

You Make My Dreams Come True by [kittenCorrosion](#)

Series: [Stranger Teens](#) [4]

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: And Of Course - Freeform, Angst, F/M, First Time, Fluff, Teenagers, if you don't like it then don't look at it okay, it's gonna have a plot, you all asked for it so here it is

Language: English

Characters: A bunch of OCs, Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Holly Wheeler, Jennifer Hayes, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Ted Wheeler, Will Byers, most are just mentioned in passing though

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Summary:

Mike is super in love with his girlfriend. He and El have been official for several months, and now he can't seem to shake the idea that he should take it a step further. But is he ready? Is she ready? Will they ever be able to get a moment alone to find out?

1. Can't Fight This Feeling

Author's Note:

yo. so i wasn't really planning on writing this, but i got several requests and then.. this chapter happened. like i was just sitting there and mike and lucas started talking and i realized that this was gonna happen. so if you're patient, hopefully the whole thing will be up by new year's.

i've never written anything like this before in my entire life, but i love ya'll so i'm going to do my best and i love mileven so i'm definitely going to do my best for their sake.

just to be clear: there is going to be sex. it's gonna happen. that's the point. so if you're not comfortable with reading it, then please, don't read it. i won't make you. they're both old enough to understand what they're doing, so i don't consider it inappropriate, but if you do, just leave.

Mike and Lucas had been working on geometry since the final bell had rung, driving over the to the Wheeler house and settling themselves in Mike's room. Lucas understood the math part of it easily, but his proofs sucked and Mike was helping him make them more coherent. They'd been at it for over an hour and were getting a bit tired of homework. Somehow they'd stopped talking about congruence and isosceles and moved onto more important matters.

"So? Do you want to sleep with her?"

Mike was laying on his back on the floor, hands over his eyes. He turned his head and peeked from under his palms at Lucas, who was sprawled on the bed with the geometry text book open in his lap. Mike squirmed, trying to think of exactly what he wanted to say.

"I mean, yeah. She's like... perfect, like wow. But..."

“But?”

He glanced at Lucas, who had an eyebrow raised, face quizzical but not judgmental.

“But... I don't know. What... what if someday she realizes she can do better than me?” He was staring at the ceiling, hands worrying at his hair, brow creased. “And then she looks back and realizes she wasted her first time on a total *loser*?”

The heavy textbook thudded onto his gut, startling him and knocking the air out of him with a grunted “*oof!*”. It hadn't been a mean blow, more of a wake up call, but he sat up on his elbows and glared at his friend. Lucas glared back, with interest.

“Mike, because I am one of your oldest friends, I am going to be nice about this.”

He took a deep breath in.

“Shut the fuck up.”

Mike's mouth gaped, unsure what to say to that.

“Um—”

“First of all, you are not a loser. Contrary to Troy's opinion, you're actually pretty cool. I mean yeah, you suck at running. And swimming. And lifting. And sports in general...”

“Wow, thanks.”

“Shut it!” Lucas glared again and Mike gulped. “So you're not good at PE, but you're the best DM we could have asked for. Like that campaign last summer? When we battled the troglodyte army for the Key to the Vale? When we didn't leave your basement for two days and your mom threatened to burn the game if we didn't end it? *That* was cool.”

Mike's lip twitched upwards. Lucas kept going.

“You are good at literally every single subject, including British Lit,

which is totally unfair—” Mike opened his mouth to protest but Lucas glared again and he decided against it, “You’re genuinely nice to everyone, even that weird girl in Bio, and you actually *care*. Like you don’t pretend you do, you actually do. Which is pretty much impossible and I still don’t know you manage to do it because I would end up killing someone...”

There was a bit of a flush creeping up Mike’s face now and as much as he appreciated the compliments, he was feeling a bit awkward.

“...and lastly don’t forget about that time you *jumped off a fucking cliff to save Dustin*.”

He let that sink in.

“So, in conclusion, you are not a loser, not to anyone who actually cares and *especially* not to El. I mean, have you met her? She looks at you like you blow sunshine out of your ass.”

Mike was actually blushing now, which was stupid. Obviously she liked him. They’d been dating for five months now, though it felt longer since they’d always been close.

“Okay fine, so say she doesn’t think I’m a loser. I still can’t... I already stole her first kiss. I couldn’t take this too.”

Lucas facepalmed so hard that Mike winced at the sound, already feeling stupid. When he looked back down at him, the words “are you fucking kidding me” almost *poured* from his eyes.

“Mike.” He paused to take a deep breath. “If you haven’t noticed, El is her own person who can consent and think for herself. You won’t be taking anything. She knows what she wants and obviously it’s you.”

“Okay but—”

“But what? What other excuse are you going to make up? Just face it. You wanna bang your girlfriend and she probably wants to do the same to you. So quit freaking out and just let it happen already.”

Mike’s mouth was gaping open as he stared at his friend, speechless.

Lucas stared back, eyebrow raised, daring him to try. He swallowed but conceded.

“Alright. Fine.” Exhaling, he looked back down at the floor. “I want to sleep with her.”

Lucas raised a fist in victory. It had been a helluva lot of work, but he'd finally convinced his dumbass friend to admit it. Now on to the next step.

“Okay, so what *exactly*, not feelings or whatever, is stopping you? You got condoms?”

“Um, uh... yeah.”

It was an entire box actually, a going-away gift from Nancy before she left for college. He'd been torn between wanting to murder her and wanting to die, but he'd kept them hidden in a box of old action figures and comics, where his mom wouldn't be snooping. He had yet to open it or even get it out of it's hiding spot.

“Alright well, you're good. Make sure she's on board one hundred percent, which she probably already is based on what you told me, and just... do it.”

Mike covered his face with his hands again, flustered and annoyed. He groaned and thumped onto his back, almost frustrated to the point of giving up on the conversation.

“It's not... you don't just... come on, Lucas, it isn't that easy.”

“Yeah it is.”

“No, it's not.”

“Dude, seriously it is.”

“How would *you* even know? You've never...”

There was a beat of silence.

“Wait a minute.”

He sat up, cross-legged, staring up at the other boy casually slouching on the bed. Narrowing his eyes, he looked Lucas up and down, suspicious. At first Lucas tried to keep a straight face, but then he smirked, his eyes knowing and full of laughter. Mike almost tripped over himself trying to stand up, pushing books off the bed and sitting down, level with Lucas, face incredulous.

“Oh my god. Oh my *god*. LUCAS.”

Lucas’s cheshire grin stretched further, though his face darkened a bit with a blush.

“WHEN. WHO. WHAT.”

Mike reached forward to shake him.

“Why didn’t you *tell* us you... you ass! ”

He smacked Mike’s hands off of him and rolled his eyes.

“Calm down, Mike. It’s not like I’m the virgin Mary or something.”

“Not anymore!”

“Just shut up. It was last summer, okay?”

The look of confusion that filled Mike’s face made him snort out a laugh. Clearly he was trying to remember the entire summer and failing.

“I went to astronomy camp for like three weeks, remember?” Mike’s eyes widened with sudden clarity and Lucas continued before he could ask the obvious question. “Her name was, uh is, Hannah. We met the first day and hung out the entire time. We used to write letters.”

All of this was news to Mike and he didn’t even know where to start with questions. Lucas tried to answer as many as he could before they were even asked.

“It was the last weekend on the overnight trip. No, I didn’t... plan it or anything. Yes, she was totally cute, and she stopped writing me

after she got a boyfriend a few months later. We're both cool or whatever."

"But.. I mean, how did that... you did the... with... oh my god, *Lucas*.
"

Mike so far could only sputter, not even sure what he wanted to ask. The first question popped out of his mouth before he could stop it.

"Was it like, good?"

Lucas snorted, unable to hold back the condescending laughter.

"Fucking duh, Mike. Come on."

"Why didn't you tell us? Or... me?"

That sobered him a bit, and he looked down, fiddling with his calculator absentmindedly.

"I dunno. I guess... I just didn't want it to be a big deal or anything." He shrugged, glancing up at Mike. "And... I didn't want to like, brag. It just kind of happened."

Mike nodded, understanding.

"Also, I didn't need Dustin giving me shit," He put up his hands defensively as Mike glared pointedly, "...which I know is totally hypocritical, okay. But it's different with you and El."

"What does that even mean?"

"I mean like, you guys are so... solid. We've all been cheering you on since the beginning, like, we're not afraid of you guys getting... awkward or whatever." He snorted, looking at Mike almost smugly. "You probably don't even know how in love you are with her, man. A little teasing isn't going to stop you."

Now Mike was bright red and he moved the topic back to Lucas and his new revelation.

"Yeah, okay, but you... you..."

“...had sex? Yeah, I know, Mike. I was there.”

Suddenly Mike was bursting with questions, oddly specific ones, and he looked away, not even sure what to say now. He remembered back to last summer, those few weeks right after school had gotten out, when Lucas had left. It hadn't made a huge impression at the time, but he had noticed that his friend had come back from camp seeming less cocky and more... confident. Even now, he seemed fairly at ease, albeit a bit embarrassed, with the subject in general. So far Mike couldn't even get the word “intercourse” out without wanting to cover his face with his hands. Celibacy was looking more appealing. He forced one of his questions out.

“So... you guys like, um, used protection or something... right?”

“Obviously. She had it, actually. Apparently her counselor handed a bunch of condoms out as a joke at the beginning of camp. Came in handy.”

He was so casual about it, that Mike almost broke out in a sweat.

“And she was... nice?”

A snort. “She was way more than nice.”

“Do you miss her?”

There was a pause.

“I mean, I didn't think we were going to be together forever. She's from Tennessee, we both knew there would be distance.” He shrugged. “And last I heard she was happy, so I guess I don't really miss her like that. She was a good friend, even before all of the...” He waved his hand nonchalantly.

“How did it even.... happen?”

“What, do you want a play-by-play or something? Need some ideas?”

He was grinning, eyebrows waggling, but Mike crossed his arms, unamused.

“Seriously.”

“Okay, fine, seriously. Um.” Lucas looked thoughtful for a moment, trying to find the best way to explain. “Well, I kind of kissed her the first weekend, and then whenever we had time alone it just kept getting heavier. Do you know how easy it is to sneak away at astronomy camp?”

He mimicked an overly chipper smile, eyes wide and scary-happy.

“Hey, Mr. Feldman, Hannah and I are going to go practice collimation and observe the conjunction of Mars and Orion, since it’s transparent enough tonight?””

He broke character, giving Mike a devious smile.

“Boom. Three hours alone in the woods. Nobody even bothered to come and check if we were actually studying. I think they assumed we’d all be too nerdy to be horny or something.” He snickered, eyes still satisfied at the memory. Mike nodded his head, biting his lip. Overcoming his awkwardness, he finally asked the question that had been bothering him, not just during this conversation, but about the whole topic.

“Hey, um... did it like, hurt her or something? Because I heard with girls... it does the first time?” He really only had the tales overheard in the locker room to go off of. “Because like, I can’t... I don’t want to hurt her. I couldn’t.”

He was looking down at his hands, fidgeting with his watch. Lucas sighed.

“Honestly, man, I’m not sure. She seemed to have a good time, but I’d heard that too.” Their eyes met and he shrugged. “Maybe it just depends on if she’s in the mood or not... I mean, remember what Brady DeMarco said that one time? About Abby?”

They’d had a group project for Geography a few months ago and Brady had spent the whole time ranting about how his girlfriend had lied about being virgin because there hadn’t been any blood after their first time. Mike had thought it was weird, he’d grown up with

the pair and Abby had been completely devoted to Brady since they were in middle school, she didn't seem like the type to cheat. Of course they hadn't been much help to the disgruntled teen, but it had raised some questions in their own minds.

"I feel like they should teach us more about this shit. Like how the hell should I know how any of... *that*... works."

He was referring to female anatomy of course. Both of the boys sighed, frustrated. Lucas felt bad that he couldn't help, and Mike just wanted an answer so he could maybe actually do the thing without feeling horrible about hurting her. Lucas looked over, face unsure, and offered a suggestion.

"I mean, maybe... you could call Nancy. She's always been pretty straightforward about that stuff, right? The educating-men-about-women thing?"

Mike looked horrified.

"NO. No, no way, come on, I don't want to know about my sister"

"I didn't say to ask her about her sex life, I meant about female... stuff." He shrugged, not trying to force his suggestion, but not giving up on it. "Don't you guys have some pact where you tell each other everything? I bet she'd be able to actually tell you what to do."

He had a valid point. Mike and Nancy weren't best friends or anything, but after that November, they'd shared a lot, both mourning the losses of someone major in their lives, shared tears on old polaroids, late night whisperings. She'd been gone for three years, working away at her Bachelor's in BioMedical Science, but sometimes he still missed hanging around in her doorway until she invited him in and they would talk about their day and schoolwork and how dumb their parents were. *Maybe it's not the worst idea...* Mike conceded mentally.

"Um, maybe."

There was a knock on the door and the two of them froze, hoping whoever was out there hadn't heard any of the conversation.

“Come in.”

Karen Wheeler popped her head in, smiling at the two boys, the smell of cooking following her into the room.

“Dinner will be ready in about ten minutes. Did you want to stay, Lucas?”

They both glanced at the clock, realizing how much time had passed. Lucas smiled, all polite and parent-approved, and nodded. Like he would turn down a meal at the Wheelers.

“Alright, I’ll expect you down in ten minutes!”

She left in a whirl, shutting the door again behind her, and the two relaxed, relieved that she had not, in fact, been eavesdropping. They picked up their books and actually finished some homework, letting the conversation drop.

After dinner Lucas went home, and Mike snagged the phone, going to his room and making sure to lock the door. This phone call was going to be awkward enough, he didn’t want to risk being overheard. Dialing the number he had taped to his desk, he listened to the line ring, jiggling his leg nervously. *This is such a stupid idea what am I even thinking I should just hang up...*

“Hello?”

“Nancy?”

“Oh, hey, Mike, I wasn’t expecting you to call me...”

“I can let you go if you need it’s not a big deal—”

“Woah, hey, calm down, I said I wasn’t expecting it, not that I was busy. The phone rang right when I walked into my room, it was just weird. What’s up?”

“Um, can I, uh, can I ask you something?”

“Duh. Of course.”

“Um, well, I, um—”

“Just spit it out, Mike. I’m not gonna hang up.”

He flinched, cringing and jiggling his leg faster, seriously considering hanging up himself. He exhaled heavily.

“Okay, well, you’re a girl.”

“Obviously.”

He could almost hear her rolling her eyes and he huffed. She took the lead, guessing easily what her seventeen-year-old brother could be asking her about.

“Is it about El?”

“...yeah.”

“Okay, what about her?”

He heard her take sharp breath.

“Oh my god, she isn’t pregnant, is she? Shit, Mike if that’s what this is—”

“No! No, Jesus Christ, why would you assume *that*? We haven’t even —”

He choked on his words, realizing he’d said more than he meant to.

“Ohhhhh,” Nancy’s voice sounded way too smug, “Okay, I see.” He rolled his eyes at her superior tone. “Alright, well, let’s start with the basics, do you still have that box I gave you?”

Mike nodded, then almost slapped himself when he realized she couldn’t see him. He cleared his throat.

“Um, yeah.”

“Throw them out.”

“Wait, what? But I thought—”

“Shut up and do it. Those things are like, what, three years old now? They could be expired. Toss them out or you might actually have to worry about pregnancy.”

His brow furrowed. They could expire? He should probably have known that.

“Okay...”

“And if you don’t want to buy more you can always ask the nurse at school. She’s actually pretty cool.”

Yeah, no. He wasn’t going to ask the ancient lady who sat in the school office for condoms. Hell no.

“Awesome.” He tried to fake enthusiasm and failed miserably. “Sounds great.”

“You can just buy some, it’s fine, it was just a suggestion. How far have you guys gone?”

“What—Nancy, I’m not, I-I can’t... I’m not answering that! That’s *private*.”

“Well, geez, I don’t want explicit details. Have you guys actually talked about it? Because if you try to force anything on her, so help me God, I will fly back to Hawkins and—”

“I would *never* do that.”

His voice was so intense that Nancy shut up. His face was red, indignant, and he was clutching the phone tightly, knuckles white.

“I can’t believe you’d think... that I would... *I love her*, Nancy.”

It was Nancy’s turn to be embarrassed.

“I know, I’m sorry, Mike. It’s just... that kind of shit happens way too often out here and it just.. I *hate* it. I don’t... I’m sorry, I don’t actually think you would do that.”

He swallowed and unclenched his fist, calming down at her apology.

She had a point, he'd heard stories, whispers about girls at school, and more than anything he never wanted El to be that girl. It pissed him off just to think about it.

"It's fine, I know you don't think that."

There was a lull, not awkward, but quiet. Nancy wasn't sure where to go from there, and Mike was struggling to find a way to ask the question that was still bothering him. He cleared his throat again.

"Nancy?"

"Yeah."

"Does... does it like... hurt? I mean, um, the first time, because I've heard—er, I mean, I know—Um, I don't know, actually, that's the problem...."

"Are you talking about virginity?"

"I guess."

Nancy rubbed her temples, flashing back to the chilly November night at Steve's.

"And you want to know if it hurts? For girls?"

"Um, yeah."

"Okay, well that's hard to say because it's different for everyone. But, I can say that it doesn't *have* to, not if she's... ready enough. Does that make sense?"

She was trying to be delicate, for his sake. He was clueless.

"No."

A sigh.

"Okay, well, do you want me to give you a rundown of how everything works from a biological standpoint, or do you want me to be frank?"

“Um, start with the first one.” He hoped hearing the scientific explanation would be less awkward. He was good at science.

“Woman have vaginas—”

“Oh my god, Nancy, I know that.”

“Let me finish, Michael.”

He knew she was serious when she used his full name. His mom didn’t even use it as threateningly.

“Fine.”

“Okay, so like I was saying, women have vaginas. Now, when we get aroused—”

She went into a semi-brief explanation of what exactly the signs of arousal were, how he would be able to tell, and how to help. By the time she was done she was proud of her ability to be so professional. Mike, however, was dying.

“Jesus Christ, Nancy. What was the frank version of that? Or do I even *want* to know?”

“Just get her wet, Mike. It shouldn’t be that hard if she actually likes you.”

He thought his face was going burst into flame.

“I’m *never* asking you anything ever again.”

“That’s your choice,” she shrugged, “but did you learn? Are you now aware of how not to hurt your girlfriend?”

“...yeah. Thanks. I guess.”

She laughed on the other end.

“Well, hey, you gave me a chance to actually use the stuff from my Medical Terminology class, so really, thank you.”

“I still don’t think I needed to know what exactly a cervix is but—”

“Mike? Nancy?”

The line had been picked up somewhere in the house and Mike almost dropped the phone as he heard his mother’s voice. Nancy sounded strained as she answered.

“Hi, Mom.”

“What are you two talking about? You’ve been on the line for an hour, Michael.”

Before Mike could pipe up, Nancy answered, lying so smoothly he decided to just keep his mouth shut.

“Mike had some questions for his Bio project. He figured I might have a clue since I took Human A&P last semester.”

“Oh. Well that’s good, I suppose. How are you, honey? Did you get the box of cookies I sent?”

“I’m doing great, Mom, my roommate and I loved the cookies. Um, if you want I’ll talk to you when I’m done helping Mike.”

“No, no it’s fine, you two take as long as you need. I’ll call you this weekend.”

“Okay, Mommy, bye. I love you.”

“Bye, sweetie!”

They heard the click as she hung up and Mike let out a breath he didn’t know he was holding. Nancy started laughing and he joined in, not believing how close they’d come to being outed.

“Have you always been that good of a liar?”

“Definitely not. It’s way easier over the phone.”

“Thanks.” He licked his lips. “I mean, not just the lying, but, uh, the... everything.”

“Of course. We tell each other everything, right?”

Her voice was fond, he could almost hear her smiling, and he smiled back.

“Yeah.”

“So you’re going to call me right after you guys do it, right?”

“*Nancy.*”

“I’m kidding, Mike, come on. I’ll call her myself if I want details anyways...”

“Woah woah, what?”

“Kidding. Again. Sort of.”

“What do you mean ‘sort of’? You call El?”

“Actually, she calls me. I gave her my number too.”

“What?”

“You think I’d leave her alone with you boys without a lifeline? Poor thing calls me almost every week.”

“But... but what do you even talk about?”

“*That*, little brother, is none of your damn business. However, I will let you know that you shouldn’t be worried about this sex thing as much as you are.”

The laughter in Mike’s ear was borderline mocking, and he fought the urge to hang up.

“Yeah, okay. Laugh at me. Sorry I give a damn.”

Nancy quieted herself, suddenly feeling kind of bad.

“No, sorry, that’s shitty for me to laugh at you. Honestly, Mike, I’m just really proud of you. The fact that you care so much about making sure El feels safe... you’re more of a man than most of the guys I’ve met here. Don’t let anything change that.”

He flushed, not really sure what to say to that.

“Um, okay thanks.”

There was another lull. Nancy looked up as the door to her room opened, smiling at her roommate who walked in. Mike heard her cover the phone and say something he couldn't make out. Her voice came back on.

“Hey, my roommate just got back and we have to study for a MicroBiology quiz, did you have any more questions?”

“Um, no, I think that was it.”

“Alright, cool. I'll see you at Thanksgiving, but call me whenever. If you want.”

“I will. Um, thanks again, Nance.”

She was smiling, now looking at the pictures that framed the cork board behind her desk. There were a lot from her time there, new friends, intermingled with the more professional shots that were obviously sent to her by Jonathan, and some candid shots taken by her or her mom. One of her and Steve, laughing around the Christmas tree, one of her family, posed in front of the church after Easter service, even one of her and Mike, taken last year at Thanksgiving, smirking at each other across the table. A faded photobooth strip was center, and Nancy smiled at the silly faces she and Barb were making. She felt strangely sentimental.

“”Kay, bye, love you little brother.”

“Oh, um, love you too. Bye.”

He hung up and stared at the phone for a second, deciding not to be weirded out by the affectionate end to the call, and looked over at his dresser. It was scattered with D&D figures, a pale blue tie, some pencils and loose change and candy wrappers. His eyes went to the framed photo in the center. It was of him and El on the steps in house, right before they left for Junior prom, taken by Jonathan. They had taken several stiff shots, Mike posing awkwardly, not sure where to put his hands while El beamed at the camera. This picture

was the last one they'd taken, more candid, when he'd cracked a joke and she'd looked up at him, hand raised to smack his chest affectionately, her laughter frozen on her face. He had finally relaxed, the stiff posture melting as he smiled back down at her laughing face, arms still wrapped around her waist. She'd given the framed photo to him as soon as it had been developed, citing it as a gift that didn't need a reason. He knew she had a matching copy taped to the edge of her mirror.

Staring at her smiling face in the picture, he remembered the conversation he'd just had and realized that maybe... just maybe, he was ready.

Notes for the Chapter:

so what do you think so far?

this one is kinda tame, but i love writing lucas so i couldn't help but give him something fun to talk about. this is also my first time really writing nancy, so that was fun.

next chapter will hopefully be up on tuesday or wednesday. comments and kudos always seem to inspire me to go faster... hmmm. but for reals, let me know your thoughts! prompts! ideas! critiques! give it to me.

2. Every Breath You Take

Notes for the Chapter:

first off, i'm going to give shimmerangels a shout out because she gave me a prompt that ended up inspiring this chapter. which is important because what happens in the chapter is kind of going to affect the rest of the story haha. so thank you, i appreciate it soooo much.

the other thing is just that i had to add another chapter because chapter four ended up getting so long i had to split in two. i apologize for making it so long but i just really want to get everything right and it requires so much deTAIL goOD HEAVENS.

anywhoo i hope you like it.

It had been a week and a half since his conversations with Nancy and Lucas, and so far Mike hadn't been able to get a single moment alone with El. Between her British Lit paper, his Honors Chemistry homework, their jobs—she was picking up shifts at the library and he worked part time at RadioShack—and friends and family, they'd hardly seen each other. It was driving Mike out of his mind.

They'd almost had a moment, she'd come over after dinner on Sunday, having told him he deserved a study break. He'd just pulled her down on his bed, both of their faces hungry, when Holly had burst through his door, voice chanting El's name excitedly. She'd claimed that El had promised to make cookies with her and El had tried not to look disappointed as she remembered that she had, in fact, made that promise. The look she'd given Mike as she was dragged from the room mirrored his frustration. He'd almost murdered himself for not remembering to lock the door.

After that they'd only seen each other at lunch or in classes, catching kisses between the ringing bell before she disappeared with her English tutor and he went to AV Club. It didn't help that she'd gone to a sleepover Saturday night. Her friend, Tracy, was mostly a school

friend, but occasionally she would invite El over or out shopping and El would eagerly agree, happy for some female company. It was ruining Mike's life.

It was now Friday, and he'd been scheming all week to try and get her alone, convincing her to come over for dinner, casually mentioning that his mom was making a banana cream pie. Her favorite. Not that she didn't want to come over, but she usually spent her Friday evening on the couch with Hopper, watching Miami Vice and sharing a carton of Fudge Ripple. It was kind of a sacred time, but she could occasionally be tempted away, and Mike was willing to offer her a lifetime supply of Eggos if it meant he could get a few hours with her. He was honestly getting desperate, afraid he would lose his nerve.

Opening the door and seeing her face smiling at him was better than winning any science fair trophy, and his heart beat extra fast, like it had been lately every time he saw her. But something was... different. His eyes narrowed as he took in her appearance. She was wearing makeup, but more than usual, swapping out her pink chapstick for red lipstick, her usual light mascara/eyeliner duo made heavier by a sweep of gray shadow. Her outfit was also brighter than usual, the familiar sundress or skirt and polo combo forsaken for purple tights, a short black skirt, and an oversized green sweatshirt that fell off her shoulder. He looked up at her face, then back at her outfit.

"Um, you look nice."

She leaned forward to kiss him on the cheek and he let her, but he noticed there was guilt in her eyes. As she pulled back and stepped inside, she turned to him, fiddling with the edge of her shirt. He was confused, suddenly a bit uneasy, unable to read the situation or her emotions. Glancing up at him, she opened her mouth to explain what was going on.

"Mike, um—"

"El!"

Holly's voice shrieked from the stairs and the small girl came

bouncing down, almost knocking El over with the force of her hug. Mike was still looking at El, eyebrows raised, and she mouthed “later?”, eyes apologetic, as Holly dragged both of them to the table.

Dinner was almost awkward, Mike barely paying attention, more focused on what could be wrong. Had he done something? Was she mad at him for noticing her outfit? Did Nancy tell her about that conversation? Did... did she want to go out with someone else? It was a severe overreaction, but usually he was able to figure out her moods and thoughts effortlessly, and right now he was stumped. She seemed to be a little off too, only eating one piece of pie instead of her usual two, promising to take the extra home for Joyce. By the time they’d finished eating, even Karen seemed to notice something wasn’t right, glancing between her son and his girlfriend, saying nothing but taking in everything.

After dinner El volunteered to help with dishes, as usual, and Mike joined her, standing side by side at the sink, him washing, her rinsing and drying. He glanced at her from the side, meeting her eyes, and she motioned towards Ted, who was still in the kitchen, pouring himself a glass of scotch. As soon as he’d left, she turned to face him.

“Mike—”

“Is everything okay? What’s wrong? Did I do something? I’m sorry, I really did mean that you look nice...”

She blinked at his outburst, taken aback, and then laughed lightly.

“What? No. Nothing’s wrong,” she assured him.

He relaxed, her breezy laughter immediately soothing his worries away. He felt like an idiot for overreacting so badly.

“Oh. Okay. So, um... what’s up?”

Glancing at the ground, she shifted her feet, suddenly nervous again. She looked at him, worrying her lip between her teeth.

“Don’t hate me...”

“I wouldn’t do that.”

His face was genuine and she relaxed this time, smiling softly in appreciation at his undoubted loyalty.

“Well, um, I know you really wanted to hang out alone tonight... and we can, but...”

“But?”

“I got invited to a party.”

Mike’s eyebrows shot up. That was all? He thought she was going to tell him she had a date with someone else or something. Yeah, he was definitely hoping to get some alone time with her, but this was only a minor obstacle. They could check it out real quick and then maybe head back here. How long could a party take?

“Oh.”

“It was at Tracy’s sleepover. Alana Jackson was there and said she was having a party. I told her I would come...”

His eyebrows went up even further, disappearing into his mop of hair. Alana Jackson was one of the more popular girls at school, and she was known for her parties. It didn’t surprise him that El had snagged an invite, she was pretty likable, but he was surprised that she actually wanted to go. Neither of them had been to a party before, or at least none that were like this.

“So... you’re going then?”

“Only if you come with me. I... I told her I couldn’t go unless I could bring you.”

“Oh.”

His heart warmed despite his sudden anxiety. A party? An *Alana Jackson* party? It was an entirely new and potentially uncomfortable social situation that he would rather skip. But he remembered the promise he’d made to himself to try and help her do normal things and sighed. He looked over at her again. She was giving him those eyes, the ones she knew he couldn’t say no to and he felt his resolve melting. *After all it’s not like anything really crazy could happen, not*

with the both of us there...right?

“Well, I mean... you do look really hot,” he grinned.

Her whole face lit up and she flew at him, wrapping her arms around his neck and hugging him tight, flinging soapy sink water everywhere.

“Thank you!”

Despite his reluctance, and now soaked shirt, he couldn't help but smile at her excitement. They talked about homework and Dustin's latest crush as they finished the dishes, everything back to normal. He ran upstairs to change, grabbing the only “cool” thing he had, a The Clash shirt Will had given him, and then fussed with his hair a bit to try and make it less flat. With a sigh he gave up, deciding it wouldn't get any better, and then grabbed his keys and wallet and headed back down to where El was waiting by the front door. He turned and yelled towards the living room.

“Mom! I'm taking El home, I might hang out at the Byers for awhile!”

“Be home by midnight!”

Mike felt a little guilty for lying, but he shook it off as they headed out to the car. It was mid September, but the last dying gasp of summer kept the night air warm. El gave him the directions to Alana's house, instructing him to park a few blocks away. They held hands as they walked towards the sound of music and laughter, Mike trying to relax instead of focus on the upcoming social interaction he was going to be forced into. El seemed excited, if a bit jittery, but gave him a warm smile before knocking on the door. Alana's smiling face answered, and before he could blink she was pulling them in, the house dark except for a few fixtures that had been covered in red table clothes, making everything glow a dull magenta. The sound of Van Halen's guitar shrieked through the rooms, teenagers milling about, some holding beer bottles, some breathing out smoke that made the entire atmosphere hazy.

El's eyes were wide, but she let herself be dragged into the kitchen, Alana chatting excitedly as she mixed up something, pouring in a

generous amount of vodka and juice before handing it to El, who took a sip, trying not to cringe at the taste. She held it out to Mike who shook his head, showing her his car keys before shoving them back into his pocket. Alana disappeared, a gracious host, leaving the two of them in the kitchen with several drunk people. Mike glanced at the cup in El's hands.

"You don't have to drink that if you don't want it. It's probably mostly alcohol."

She looked down at her drink and shrugged. They'd been allowed glasses of champagne on New Year's and he knew she was kind of a lightweight, getting giggly and flushed easily. He knew whatever was in that cup was way stronger than champagne.

"It's... okay," she shrugged.

She glanced around the room, noticing that pretty much everyone had some sort of drink or bottle in their hand. *It's the right thing to do*, she thought, *at a party*. She didn't want to do the wrong thing.

They ended up in the living room, around the edge of the dance floor, bobbing lightly to the music but not really committing to dancing.

Mike would have been happy to leave right then, but he wanted to make sure that she had experienced whatever it was she was hoping for. He'd kind of sworn to himself to help her see everything, try out anything she wanted, since she had missed so much as a kid. Nothing irrational, but stuff like this party. Stuff "normal" teenagers did. She deserved that much, he would tell himself. It was one of the only reasons they were in the first place. So far, she didn't seem super impressed, mostly observational. Her eyes drifted up to his.

"Is this fun?"

She had to yell to be heard over the music and he shrugged.

"It's fine. Are you having fun?"

This time she shrugged, taking a bigger swig from her cup, getting used to the taste. Just then a pair of hands snagged her waist and she

shrieked, turning to face Tracy, who was laughing behind her. Tracy Hollingsworth was tall and willowy, her red hair spilling over shoulder, her bright eyes lighting up as she talked excitedly to her friend. Her and El had bonded freshman year over a dislike for English classes, being paired up for a reading of Shakespeare. They weren't besties or anything, but they both had an understanding that they could count on each other. Even now, El had relaxed, more at ease now that someone who knew what to do was there. Tracy glanced at Mike.

"Can I steal your girlfriend for a bit?"

"Uh, sure," he shrugged, not really loving the thought of being left alone.

El looked apologetic as she followed her friend, but Mike just smiled awkwardly, figuring if she was happy, he would be okay. She would only be gone for a bit and he figured it was girl stuff, which he didn't care to intrude upon. He wandered down the hall, out of the living room and into what appeared to be a sitting room, spotting an empty love seat. He plopped down, sipping the can of Pepsi he found back in the kitchen, observing the actions of those around him. About fifteen minutes had passed and he was starting to get a little antsy, almost wondering if he should have brought a book. There was a couple in the corner who were making out wildly, and he looked away, wondering how drunk you had to be to do that in front of other people. Someone plopped down next to him, and he looked over to find Jennifer Hayes. He hadn't really seen her since... prom. She glanced at him, then realized who he was and squinted, looking him up and down.

"Wheeler?"

He gave her an awkward little wave.

"Hi."

"What are you doing here?" Her eyes darted around the room hopefully. "Is Will here?"

"Um, no, sorry, I came with El. Just the two of us."

“Where is she?”

He glanced down at his watch. She'd been gone almost twenty minutes now and he was getting a bit worried, but he didn't want to admit that he was feeling left out, and he definitely didn't want to be a boring buzzkill. He wasn't even sure where'd she gone and the realization put him on edge. Maybe it was time to try and find her again, even if she didn't want to leave yet. He shrugged.

“Um, I'm not sure. Tracy took her.”

Jennifer snorted.

“Good luck getting her back.” She snagged the Pepsi can out of his hand, taking a long drink, and he realized she was drunk. “They're probably downstairs in the basement. If you decide to go look for her.”

“Oh, um, thanks. I might just wait...”

He decided she could have the Pepsi, which was good because she ended up finishing it anyways. So much for that.

“I wouldn't.” She glanced at him, eyes unreadable. “Wait, I mean. These parties get crazy. Especially the basement.”

It was quiet for a moment, and she tugged at her hot pink skirt self-consciously before standing up, looking down at him seeming bored with the whole situation.

“Bring Byers next time. I might actually have fun.”

With that she disappeared back into the crowd, leaving Mike puzzled over her words. He really didn't know anything about parties, but something about the way she'd talked to him sent a pang of worry through him and he decided that it was definitely time to look for El. It had now been about half an hour since she'd disappeared with Tracy.

Heading out of the den, he searched for the stairs to the basement, fumbling around a bit before finding the door after pushing yet another horny couple out of the way. There were shouts coming up

the stairs and as he descended he was met by the sight of several unopened kegs, one open keg, an array of bottles of what Mike guessed was cheap booze, and a circle of people playing what appeared to be a drinking game.

“Never have I ever lost my virginity!”

Several people took shots, while others took swigs from cups of beer. In the corner sat El, looking oddly dazed, Tracy’s arm thrown over her shoulder as the taller girl laughed and took another drink. As El refrained from drinking the shot that sat in front of her, the people sitting closest to her laughed, making cracks at her for still being celibate. Mike had chosen the worst time to walk in.

“Wheeler!”

Everyone turned to look at him, including El, and it was only the way her hazy eyes screamed “save me” that kept him from turning around and running back up the stairs. He looked around the room, heart thudding wildly in his chest. He gave them an awkward wave, his only move.

“Uh, hi guys.”

Nothing could have prepared him for the onslaught.

“You guys haven’t banged yet?!”

“Hop on it, El!”

“You afraid of pussy, Mikey boy?”

“OOOOH!”

“Get laid!”

His face burned crimson, hands fisting, and he looked down at the floor, wishing it would open up and swallow him. A few more taunts were hurled, someone making gross sounds and moaning his name, and then he was forgotten as the next “never have I ever” was announced. He turned to leave, but hesitated, torn between wanting to disappear and wanting to go rescue El. Thankfully, she had

managed to stand up and make her way after him, her need to give in to the peer pressure shattered at the sight of his embarrassed face.

“Mike!”

A small, familiar hand grabbed his own as he stood at the base of the stairs, and he turned, looking over his shoulder at El. She smelled like alcohol and he realized she was stupidly drunk, tottering a bit. He gently helped her up the stairs, opening the door and escorting her away from the raucous basement. When they'd made it into the semi-quiet hallway, he finally paused and looked at her. She was crying, her dark eye makeup trailing down her face in black tears, and despite his anger at the scene they'd just left, he felt his heart clench. He fucking hated it when she cried.

“Mike, I-I-I'm s-sorry.”

She hung her head ashamedly, unable to meet his eyes, shoulders shaking with noiseless sobs. With a defeated sigh he reached forward, pulling her to his chest and letting her cry into his shirt, staining it with mascara and snot. He nuzzled his face into her hair, rubbing her back and comforting as best as he could in the dark, smoke-filled hallway, ignoring the curious looks of the people passing by. She was emotional and drunk and he knew there was no way he could talk sense into her, at this point it would be best if he just got them both out of there. After a few minutes she quieted and pulled back, face still wet with tears. She looked terrible.

“I... I didn't mean... I-I'm s-sorry. I d-didn't know it would b-b-be l-like.... this,” she said guiltily.

He smoothed her hair down and sighed again, wishing there was more he could say. But the whole situation was her fault and he decided they could talk about it when she wasn't so inebriated.

“Let's just get you home, okay?”

She nodded and let him lead her out of the house, silent as they walked back to the car, the only sound her occasional snuffle. He unlocked his car and helped her in, then hopped in himself. As he started it up she reached over and grabbed his wrist, shaking her

head.

“Not home. Not yet.”

He looked at her, deciding that maybe that wasn't a bad idea considering how messed up she was.

“Okay, well, where do you want to go?”

“Anywhere?”

“...okay.”

He drove around aimlessly for a bit, out of the neighborhood, around downtown, trying to head for the Byers house but slowly. Every now and then he'd look over at her, but for the most part she just gazed out of the window, silent.

El was in her own world, mind hazy, but she kept hearing the jeering voices of everyone at the party, mocking her and mocking Mike. It bothered her, a lot, and she wanted to do something, to fix it, to make them stop laughing.

They'd just entered the woods, taking the long way around, from the other side of Mirkwood, where it was more rural.

“Mike.”

Her voice was weirdly loud, startling him from the quiet trance he'd been sitting in.

"Yeah, El?"

“Pull over.”

Her voice was urgent and, afraid she needed to hurl, he did so without hesitation, pulling into a small alcove of trees that hid the car from the road. He turned to her, visibly concerned and shifted into park, reaching a hand towards her to try and help her open the door. She grabbed his hand before it got there, pulling it to her lap, and she turned to look at him, eyes glinting in the dark.

“El? Are you—”

She didn't let him finish his sentence, instead pushing herself out of her seat, crawling over his lap and straddling him, arms wrapping around his neck, pulling him to her and into a kiss. Mike stiffened for a second, her sudden passion completely unexpected, but as she pressed herself against him he gave in, all of his pent-up frustrations bursting out of him as she leaned forward and breathed into his ear, her tongue trailing over his earlobe and making goosebumps spread across the back of his neck. He gathered her in his arms, suddenly frantic, and kissed her back, matching her fervor. His hands played with the edge of her sweatshirt and suddenly she was tugging it up, over her head, onto the seat next to them. She undid her bra and it followed in a few seconds, then his shirt. He was trailing kisses down her neck, to the swell of her breasts, and she clutched his head to her chest, encouraging him with a soft keen. The windows started fogging as the air in the car grew warmer. Mike was breathing hard, his mind focused on one thing, and his hand skidded up her thigh, past the edge of her skirt. She moaned into his ear as he made contact with the spot between her legs.

“Mike...!”

She tasted like vodka and orange juice when she kissed him, and she ground down onto his hand, trying to get more contact, more friction. He felt himself get hard and she did too, one of her hands traveling down his bare chest to tug at his belt, trying to slide between the layers of clothing. His swallowed heavily as he realized what she was trying to do, of what her endgame was. She paused and looked into his eyes, a smug smile quirking her flushed lips and he stared back, suddenly noticing how she looked glazed and distant.

It hit him, just how drunk she was, and the taste of alcohol in his mouth turned sour, his blood turning to ice.

“El.”

She whined in reply, reaching her other hand down, trying unbuckle his belt. He managed to pull his hands off of her body and grabbed her wrists, tugging them up, away from his pants. She tried to pull away from his grip but failed as he tightened his grip.

“*EL*.”

His voice was harsher this time and she stopped struggling, looking at him with a crooked smile.

“What?”

“How much did you have to drink?”

“Does it matter?”

“Just tell me.”

She sighed and leaned back, looking annoyed but definitely out of it, her voice slurring a bit.

“Jus’ the drink ‘Lana gave me. And uh, five... no six. Six shots.”

“You’re drunk as hell.”

Her eyes narrowed and she snorted.

“So?”

She punctuated her indifference by grinding her hips down against his, biting her lip seductively. Mike closed his eyes, breathing in heavily and praying for strength. His brain was telling him how wrong the situation was, but his lower extremities were trying to convince him to keep going.

“We... we can’t have sex,” he smothered a disappointed groan, knowing he was doing the right thing. “You’re too drunk. It’s not... right.”

“But I wanna,” she protested, trying to tug her hands away again.

“You don’t know that. Your judgement is way off right now.”

“I know what I wan’.”

“No, you don’t.”

He tried to push her off of him gently, his sudden strength and clarity

making it easy to move her back into the passenger seat. She was pouting now, arms crossed over her bare chest, and he gulped trying not feel guilty at just how disappointed she looked. It definitely couldn't happen right now, she was so wasted she couldn't even glare properly, eyes focusing in and out. Mike sighed, reaching over to try and put her shirt back on her, grabbing his own in the process. She allowed herself to be dressed, but didn't seem happy.

"I'm going to take you home now, okay?"

The car was still on, so he put it in reverse and headed back to the road, trying to convince himself he'd done the right thing. His brain agreed, but his hard-on most definitely did not. Within minutes she had passed out and he decided that he wouldn't hate himself for doing the right thing.

By the time he'd pulled up to her house, she was snoring, drooling on the window, and he realized she probably wasn't going to be able to wake up anytime soon. With a sigh he came around the side of the car, opening the door and hefting her up, carrying her bridal style. It occurred to him that carrying her into the house, directly into the line of sight of her parents when she was like this, wasn't a good idea, and he headed around the side of the house to Will's room, softly tapping on the window. Will appeared, opening the window, taking in the scene before him with worried eyes.

"Is she okay?"

There was no hiding the concern in his voice.

"She'll be fine, she's just passed out drunk."

Will looked at him, almost accusatory, and Mike quickly explained.

"She wanted to go a party Alana Jackson's. So we went. And she got drunk. We were there for maybe an hour, I don't know... I didn't think this could happen that quickly."

It was fairly self explanatory, and Will sighed, still not looking pleased.

"Come to the back door, I'll open it."

Mike nodded and they split, him heading around the back and up the stairs, the door opening and closing almost silently. He headed for her room, setting her on the bed and pulling her shoes off before pulling back the covers and tucking her in. She mumbled something under her breath and then snuggled into the sheets, sighing contentedly. He bent down and pressed a kiss to her forehead before heading back out into the hallway.

“Why did you let her get this bad?”

He’d barely shut the door behind him when Will’s voice hissed at him from the shadows and he turned to face his angry friend, taking on a defensive tone.

“You think I *wanted* this to happen? We were there for twenty minutes and then she just... disappeared. I got her out of there as soon as I could.”

“You shouldn’t have let her go in the first place.”

Mike was glaring now, annoyed that he was getting all the blame.

“What was I supposed to do? Chain her to the wall? She can do what she wants and I thought if I was there... it would be okay.”

“You could have told her it was a bad idea. Because it was.”

“I didn’t know it was going to be like that, okay?”

“What else did you let her do?”

“I didn’t *let* her do *anything*! She chose to do things. I did the best I could to help.”

“You should have tried harder!”

Will was fierce, and even though Mike was irate, he respected his friend’s protectiveness of his sister. He shook his head, hands up, submissive and suddenly very tired. He sighed.

“I did the best I could...” he repeated, deflating, “she... I...” He wasn’t about to admit what had gone on in the car. Instead he stared

down at the ground, defeated. "I'm sorry, okay? I'll leave now."

Will crossed his arms, but stepped to the side, letting the taller boy slip past, noting the frustration on his face. It really wasn't Mike's fault, but he was too angry to admit it, instead letting him slip back out the back door without bothering to say goodbye. After he had gone, Will tiptoed back to El's room, to check on her, but she seemed like her usual sleeping self. With a sigh he shut the door and headed back to his room.

Mike drove home angry and frustrated. They'd finally had some time alone but he still couldn't make himself do it. *Not when she's drunk, it isn't right*, he told himself over and over again. He pulled up to his house and parked, still distracted, trying not think about it. As he got out of the car he didn't notice the pink fabric half wedged under the passenger seat. Instead he went inside, saying hi to his mom when she stuck her head out of the kitchen.

"Did Joyce like the pie?"

"Hm?"

He looked over at her, mind still far away.

"The pie. That El took home?"

"Oh, uh, I don't know." He was pretty sure they'd forgotten to even take the slice with them when they left. He made something up. "I didn't see Joyce."

"Oh. Okay..." she wrung the washcloth in her hand. "Hey, Mike?"

"Yeah, mom."

"Are you okay? Is... are you and El alright?"

At the mention of her name his mind snapped back, and he focused on his mom's face. Her eyes were concerned, and she reached a hand out to smooth his hair down. He kept his voice level and hoped he didn't smell like weed or beer.

"Yeah, no, everything's great. We're great," he smiled weakly.

She knew he was lying but didn't press the issue, simply sighing and pulling her hand away. She wished he would tell her the truth.

"That's good." She paused, not wanting to bother him when he seemed so tired, but asked anyway. "Can you do me a favor tomorrow?"

"Uh, yeah, sure."

"Can you take Holly to her piano lesson? At eleven thirty? I need to run over to the school for a quick PTA meeting and it would help a lot. I'll let you drive the wagon so you don't have to move her car seat into your car."

Mike shrugged, indifferent to her proposition. He mostly just wanted to be alone right now, so he would have said yes to anything if it got her off his back.

"Yeah, no problem."

They swapped out keys and she patted him affectionately as he walked up the first couple of steps, hands in his pockets.

"Thanks, sweetie."

"Sure, mom." He paused on the stoop, shoulders drooping. "I'm... I'm going to bed."

She was surprised. It was barely past ten, and on a Friday night.

"Oh, well, good night then."

"Night."

Karen watched as he trudged up the stairs. Something was definitely wrong, but she couldn't make him talk until he was ready. With a sigh she tucked his car key into the pocket of her robe and headed back into the kitchen.

Upstairs, Mike was laying on his bed, staring at the ceiling, still worried. He knew he had done the right thing, but now he kept hearing Will's words in his head, blaming him for letting her go to

the party in the first place. It was his fault, he should have known better.

He didn't sleep.

Notes for the Chapter:

there was spicy-ness to get you through the next few chapters haha. just in case anyone doubted that mike is the perfect gentleman, i had to make it even more clear. sorry for the angst, but it's teenagers what can you expect?

next chapter will hopefully be up in a few days! my editor has been busy, but i really value his input when it comes to this story so it's worth the wait, i promise you guys.

if you caught the reference to Junior Prom 2.0, you rock, gold stars for you! i love you all dearly, thank you so much for the feedback and prompts and inspiration. it really motivates me to get this thing done and to do it well.

also i'm hella sick and lost my voice because i stayed up two nights in a row to write. so if that doesn't deserve a comment i don't know what does hahahahaha oh god.

3. Don't You Want Me

Notes for the Chapter:

merry almost christmas! and if you don't do christmas than i hope your holidays are bright. <3

i'm so grateful for all of you, truly. when i read your comments and stuff i literally can't stop smiling and i just wanted tell you how much you all mean to me.

but enough of my sappiness. i hope this chapter makes up a bit for the angst of the last one. being a teenager is hard. also, i'm totally not endorsing underage drinking. don't do that, or you'll end like el... well... you'll see.

happy reading!

El woke up to the sunlight streaming through the window over her bed. She groaned, covering her face with her floral print quilt and rolled over to try and find a shadow to lay in. Her mouth felt dry, like she'd been sucking on cotton, and her head was *pounding*. More than anything she just wanted to go back to sleep, but her headache told her she couldn't and she slowly tried to drag herself out of bed to get some water.

Sitting up sucked. She tried to steady herself as she was hit by a head rush, and the room spun, even after her vision cleared. She looked down, attempting to stop the spinning, and realized she was still wearing her outfit from last night. Her eyes felt sticky with day-old mascara and when she caught her reflection in the mirror on her door she cringed at the mess that was her face. In a flash it all came back to her. The party, the cup of bitter juice, the drinking game, the taunts, and Mike. Oh shit, *Mike* .

It hurt too much to think, so she decided to focus on changing first. Slowly standing, she toddled over to her dresser, wincing as each step made her head pound worse, and dug around for some clean clothes, finding an old t-shirt, a comfy hoodie—which had probably been

Mike's at one point—and a pair of black cropped leggings. Changing as quickly as possible to minimize the pain in her head, she pulled off her oversized sweatshirt, startled to find she was missing something important underneath.

Where is my bra? she wondered for a second longer until the entire moment in the car came back too, and her face flushed with embarrassment. *I must have left it in his car...*

Deciding that it wasn't the most important thing at the moment, she grabbed a clean one out of the drawer, and finished changing, too lazy and hungover to bother throwing her dirty clothes in the hamper. She wanted a glass of water. And the phone. She needed to call Mike. What time was it?

She slowly opened her door, creeping out of her room, keeping one hand on the wall to steady herself since her equilibrium was still screwed. Reaching the kitchen she looked around. The house was eerily mute, no music from Will's room, no barking as Shaggy asked to be let out, not even the sound of Hop's snoring coming from the master bedroom. El decided that she didn't need to change that, the silence soothed her head, and turned to the cabinets, wincing at the bright light streaming in the kitchen window, trying to find a cup. Finding an old plastic tumbler, she filled it with water and took a big swallow, noting that she should probably brush her teeth soon. Her mouth tasted disgusting. She glanced towards the wall, frowning when she realized the cordless phone wasn't on the hook where it belonged.

"Did you have fun last night?"

The cup of water slipped from her hand, hitting the counter with a *thud* and falling over, spilling water everywhere. With a pained whimper she reached for the dishtowel, trying to sop up the mess she'd made. Will came up behind her with a sigh, grabbing another towel to help, feeling bad.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you."

They wiped up the water and threw the wet towels into the sink as she tried to put off facing her brother. She finally turned and looked

at him, face inquisitive.

“How do you know... about last night?”

Will rolled his eyes.

“Who do you think let you in?” He snorted. “Actually, I let Mike in, since he had to carry you from the car. You were totally wasted. I hope you at least had *fun*.”

He didn’t try to hide the scathing tone of his voice, clearly upset that she had let herself get so messed up. His arms were crossed, the usual brotherly concern he had for her hidden beneath a thick layer of disapproval.

“Oh.” She leaned against the countertop to steady herself, sighing, not sure how to explain. “Last night... it was... okay.”

He snorted and gave her a “are you serious” look. She winced, partially at her splitting headache, but mostly at her lack of words. She didn’t even know where to begin to explain what had happened. Noticing her apparent pain, he sighed defeatedly and reached for the cupboard beside them, pulling out a bottle of aspirin, and refilling her cup of water, handing both of them back to her. She blinked at him, eyes grateful, and took the medicine, letting the water soothe her dry throat. He seemed slightly more sympathetic, and she decided to try and explain.

“I didn’t know I would get that way.”

Will looked at her, confused, and she clarified.

“Drunk, I mean. Um.” She reached up with one hand to massage her temple, struggling to find words. “I’ve never had that much before. That fast. It was bad.”

“It was stupid,” he wasn’t as sympathetic as she had been hoping, “why did you even go?”

“I... I don’t know,” her voice was unsure, “They made it sound fun.”

“Who did?”

“Tracy. And Alana.”

“Well I’m sure it’s fun for them, they do it all the time. How much did you even have?”

She squinted, trying to remember. Her words in the car came back to her, and she echoed her drunken self.

“Something with orange juice in a big cup. And um, six shots.” He looked at her like she was insane, and she meekly tried to defend her stupid actions. “It was a game. ‘Never have I ever’.”

El frowned as she remembered the damning declaration that had made her stop. She could still hear the catcalls and mocking laughter, could see Mike’s face flaming in embarrassment, and vaguely remembered standing up to go to him. Her heart sank at the memory. She’d made him go to the party when he hadn’t wanted really want to, and then he’d been laughed at by people they didn’t even know. It was her fault. The guilt overwhelmed her and she shuddered out a shaky breath, suddenly anxious, face collapsing into a mask of misery.

“What? What’s wrong?”

Will was the only one who could rival Mike at sensing her emotions. They were close, both having shared their nightmares of the Upside Down, sometimes falling asleep on the same bed after whispering about the horrors they’d seen and felt. Despite not having the same bond she’d made with other boys during the week she’d first escaped, they’d formed their own. It was different, more empathetic, but definitely platonic. Joyce had a habit of calling them “the twins”, and it was uncanny how similar they would act, responding to questions the same way, or wearing matching expressions when confused. Mike didn’t let it bother him, but even he knew that whatever El and Will had, it wasn’t something he could ever understand. Normally she would have told him what was wrong immediately, but right now she didn’t want him to know what had happened at the party. She didn’t want him to be disappointed in her about that too. Instead she grabbed her forehead again, grimacing.

“It’s just... my head. Hurts.”

“Don’t lie.” His voice was harsh at first, but he let it soften, wanting to get her to talk to him. “Did something happen? Last night? Something bad?”

Tears of guilt welled in her eyes and she nodded. Will’s overprotectiveness shifted into overdrive.

“Did someone try and hurt you? What happened?”

She shook her head, sniffing. The tears were coming a bit faster now, but she managed to choke out a single word.

“Mike.”

Will was suddenly tense. He trusted Mike, even with El, but it was a new situation and he had no idea what had actually happened. His mind automatically assumed the worst and he flushed, angry. *What the hell did he do to her?*

The phone rang loudly, from where it was hidden underneath an old newspaper, startling the both of them. Will was faster—and not hungover—and snatched it from its hiding spot before El could even react.

“Byers residence.”

“Will? Hey, uh, it’s Mike. Is El there? Is she okay? After last night I was worr—”

“She’s fine.”

“Oh. Can I talk to her—”

“Not right now.”

“Uh, okay. Is she still sleeping? Cause that’s fine don’t wake her up or anything, um... can you tell her I called?”

“I don’t think that’s the best idea.”

Will’s voice was icy cool, and El looked up at him curiously as she sipped her water and wiped the tears out of her eyes. She hadn’t

really been paying attention to the conversation, too busy trying to calm herself, but his tone had piqued her interest.

“Huh? Will, what’s going—”

“I have to go. And take care of my sister. Bye.”

He hung up the phone, on it’s hook this time, and turned back to El who had managed to swallow her tears and was now giving him a curious look.

“Who?”

He waved his hand dismissively.

“Just a telemarketer.”

If she knew more about telemarketers, it would have been obvious that whoever had just called at eleven o'clock on a Saturday morning was not a telemarketer. At the moment she wasn't really in the mood to argue anything, so she shrugged it off, focusing back on her water cup instead. Will focused back on her, looking serious.

“What did Mike do?”

She looked over at Will, confused at his question, and then she shook her head as she realized what he was thinking, wincing again at the sudden moment..

“No, he didn't do anything...” she swallowed heavily, “they... laughed at Mike. He helped me leave.” The tears were back and she sniffled again, feeling guilty. “The game... he came down and I didn't drink and they all laughed at us. And I felt stupid. And I did something stupid.”

“They laughed at you? For not drinking?”

El was struggling to explain, everything suddenly feeling overwhelming, and she blurted out what it was before she realized who she was talking to.

“No, for not having sex.”

The atmosphere was suddenly extremely awkward and El flushed, realizing she'd said too much. He'd been supportive of her and Mike, but he always got grossed out if she mentioned anything. They'd kind of made a silent agreement not to talk about it, but she had just shattered that with her outburst and he shifted, clearly uncomfortable.

"Oh. Ah. That's... good, I guess?"

She glared at him and he put up his hands defensively.

"Sorry, not the being-made-fun-of part, the other thing."

She was still glaring but she broke a bit, letting the tears pour silently down her face, more embarrassed than sad.

"I did something stupid. And he... he was good. Because he's Mike."

"So Mike didn't do anything... you did?"

Will suddenly felt extremely guilty. Maybe he shouldn't have been so harsh during that phone call. His curiosity got the better of him and he reached out, poking her arm, trying to be understanding.

"What did you do?"

El wiped her nose, not making eye contact.

"I-I tried."

"Tried to what?"

"To... to sex."

He choked a bit and sputtered, trying to think of something to say. Her grammatical blunder went unnoticed, he understood what she meant, even if she did use most sexual lingo wrong. She was staring down at the cup in her hands, shrinking down the way she did when she felt bad or wrong. Sometimes he would forget her past, the life in the lab, the lack of human contact, the constant fear she lived in. But then something like this would happen and she would revert back to the frightened twelve year old he met the February after he

disappeared, cautious and unsure. It was hard to watch, and he wanted to comfort her, but he had to make her finish this story.

“You tried to...” he couldn't make himself say it but she seemed to understand what he meant and nodded, eyes miserable, “and Mike... stopped you?”

She nodded again.

“He said it wasn't right. That I was too drunk.”

Now Will felt *really* bad. He needed to call his friend and apologize at some point later. El sniffled again and drank some more water, the pounding in her head lessening as the aspirin kicked in. Her stomach twisted with self-disgust and she swallowed heavily.

“Will.”

He looked at her, trying to seem less judgemental than he'd been before. She set the cup of water down and rubbed at her eyes.

“Will, he was right, wasn't he? I was stupid and he stopped me.”

“I mean... you weren't stupid, *exactly*. You just... weren't you last night. Don't beat yourself up about it too much, okay?. But...” he tried to find the best way to explain the concept of consent, “alcohol makes things complicated. It makes you do things you wouldn't normally do. And if you only wanted to have sex with him while you were drunk, then him going through with it would have been bad. Because you would have woken up and realized you didn't want it. And that is bad. Because nobody should do that if they don't want to, not even if they think they want to. That's rape.”

She shuddered at the word. It's not like she didn't understand things, she'd been living in the real world for four years, but sometimes words didn't make sense until they were related to a situation. This was one of them.

“I'm... I'm glad he stopped.”

It was almost a whisper. He glanced at her.

“So... you don't want... to do that?”

She shook her head, looking at him, then back at the floor, trying to find a way to explain what she wanted. She knew what she wanted, well, who, but that wasn't the point.

“No, I do. But... not, not like that,” her mind flashed back to her slurring speech and almost embarrassing forwardness, “not drunk.”

It was awkward again, and Will decided to not say anything, instead reaching over to give her quick side hug, full of brotherly support. El had stopped crying, her tears stable now that she had realized that while it had been embarrassing, she hadn't done anything too terribly wrong. Nothing that hadn't been stopped anyways. She grabbed her water off the counter and drank some more, still feeling crappy. Her headache was gone but her stomach still felt kind of gross. A wave of nausea suddenly rolled over her and she barely had time to turn around and face the sink before she was vomiting, the taste of rotten oranges souring her mouth.

Will sighed, grabbing a paper towel and handing it to her so she could wipe her face off.

“Maybe you should go back to bed. Mom and Hop went out to look at blinds and wallpaper. Apparently now that the outside of the house looks good, they want to fix up the inside. They won't be home for a few hours.”

She looked up at him and nodded and he helped her back to her room, making sure to put her trash bin next to her in case she needed to puke again, and a cup of water on the nightstand. He closed her blinds, letting the cool darkness soothe her hangover and in minutes she was back asleep. He quietly crept out of the room and shut the door behind him with a sigh.

Sisters...

&&&

Mike was still staring at the phone in his hands. What the fuck had just happened? He knew Will was upset but that was way worse than

he'd been expecting. *What did she tell him? Does he think I got her drunk on purpose or something?* He didn't have much time to think about it as Holly busted out of her room upstairs.

"Mike! Mikemikemikemike..."

Holly said his name with each step she bounced down, running to him, looking excited.

"Mommy said you're taking me to lessons!"

Trying to shake off the leftover shock from the phone call, he looked down at his little sister, allowing himself to smile at her. She really loved her piano lessons. And her ballet classes. And her tutoring sessions. Mike didn't know how she managed to have energy left over to annoy him.

"Yeah, you're right. She had a meeting." He glanced at the clock. "We'll leave in five minutes, okay? I need to go... do brush my teeth. Again."

He started to walk away, not even really needing to do anything, but just wanting a second to think before he would be subjected to her opinions about Jem and the Holograms, her favorite show and the only thing she wanted to talk about pretty much ever. He went up to the bathroom, splashing some water on his tired face, trying not to dwell on last night's happenings. His mind went back to the bizarre phone call.

"It was nothing. He was just mad. She's fine."

His reflection didn't look impressed with his assurances and he sighed, deciding putting off Holly's babbling would only get him in trouble if he made her late. He came out of the bathroom and down the stairs, finding her by the door, already shoving her feet into her miniature pink sneakers. They matched El's, a fact she was proud of, since she adored her brother's girlfriend. He was pretty sure she liked El more than him, but he decided part of it was because she missed Nancy. El had taken it all in stride, calling Holly her little sister and showering the young girl with attention. Sometimes she would even come over just to watch cartoons and color, enjoying part of a

childhood she never really had. It was sweet but sometimes Mike couldn't help but a little jealous. She was *his* girlfriend after all.

Sure enough Holly started chattering as soon as they were outside of the door, talking about “hologram” and “misfits” and “outrageous”. She strapped herself into her car seat, which was more of a booster seat now, and they took off.

“...and that’s why I wanna be Kimber for Halloween!”

He glanced at her from the rearview mirror.

“You don’t want to be Jem, Hols?”

He didn't really care that much but something about her not wanting to be her favorite character ever seemed off.

“No. El is Jem. They both are magic. I’m Kimber, Jem’s sister!”

“Holly, Jem doesn’t do magic. She just projects holograms using her earrings, and it’s not even her, it’s the program her dad built and...” He trailed off, realizing he didn’t care that much and also trying to figure out how he knew so much about the dumb, girly cartoon. Holly was giggling in the back seat.

“No, El is Jem,” she insisted, “and you’re Rio because you love each other and kiss! And you save her all the time.”

He struggled not to turn around in his seat, instead looking at her in the mirror again, confused as to where she'd acquired that idea.

“Actually, she saved me. You know the story.” He shook his head. “What does that have to do with anything?”

“I can’t be Jem. Cause then I’d have to have a Rio but that’s gross because boys are gross. So it’s you and El. And El is like Jem because of her magic and she’s the prettiest and she sings nice too.”

Mike stayed silent, agreeing in his mind about her being the prettiest. Holly continued her gushing about El and Jem until they pulled up to her piano teacher’s house. She scrambled out of her seat and headed in, waving goodbye, and he left, making sure to keep his eye on the

time. He'd have to be back in a half an hour to pick her up. On the way home he couldn't help but wonder what she had meant by him always saving El. She knew about El's powers, it had been impossible to hide after El had kept her from skinning her knees when she'd taught her to ride a bike. But Holly had been surprisingly good at keeping the secret, insisting she wanted to protect her too—not that anyone would believe an eight-year-old's tales of her magic sister anyways. That's why he was so confused, because never once had he told her a story where he saved El. It was always the other way around. El saving him from jumping off a cliff. El saving him from being eaten by a big scary monster. El saving him from the bullies. *When have I ever saved her from anything?* Maybe he'd try and get an answer out of Holly later...

When he pulled up to his house he was surprised to see his car in the driveway, meaning his mom had gotten done earlier than she thought. Locking the station wagon, he headed into the house.

“Michael Edward Wheeler! Kitchen! Now!”

Every hair on his body stood on end as his mother's voice thundered from the kitchen. *Oh shit, did she find out about the party?* His palms started sweating but he headed that way anyways, knowing it would be better to just face the rage. His mom stood on the other side of the counter, arms crossed, eyebrow raised, and as he walked in he looked down at the object that sat between them on the green countertop.

Fucking shit.

It was a bra, light pink, and Mike's first thought, after the swearing, was how cute it was. That thought quickly left as he looked up and met the stormy glare of Karen Wheeler. He gulped.

“Can you explain this to me, Mike? Because I would love to hear what you have to say.”

Her eyes shifted between him and the bra, face expectant.

“Um, well... I think El left it.”

It wasn't a lie, but he wasn't willing to give more details than that.

For the most part he kept his mom in the dark about his personal life, and he assumed that she preferred it that way, so her anger at this discovery was kind of a mystery. *Why does she care so much?* he wondered. It seemed pretty obvious what it was and who it belonged to and how it had ended up in his car. Why she wanted him to explain it was a mystery.

Karen crossed her arms again, eyes narrowed.

“Are you two having sex?”

He blanched. When he was younger he’d barely been able to talk to her about his crush on El, and now she was asking him about sex? Where was this coming from? He tried to find the words that would appease her, blurting out something vague but at the same time trying to tell the truth.

“Mom, no, we... it’s not... it’s not like that.”

“It’s not like *what*, Michael? Are the two of you not dating? Did I miss something?”

Her voice was getting more hysterical, clearly something about the whole situation was striking a nerve. In fact those exact words he’d said were striking a nerve.

All Karen could picture was a late, November night four years ago, when her oldest daughter stood above her on the stairs, in clear emotional distress. She’d lied right to her mother’s face, and now the same thing was happening, but with her son.

Why don’t my children trust me? she screamed silently, letting her insecurity turn to anger instead.

“If you’re old enough to be dealing with this,” she gestured to the bra pointedly, “then clearly you are old enough to deal with repercussions of lying to your mother. You’re grounded. For a week. No, two weeks. That means no phone calls, no going over to friend’s houses, and no one coming here. Not even El. *Do you understand?* ”

Her voice was like brick wall, and Mike’s face heated as she pronounced his sentence. She hadn’t even given him a chance to

explain or defend himself. He wanted to fight back, to fight for himself—and El—but he just clenched his hands into fists, letting his fingernails dig into his palms. Exhaling angrily, he set his jaw. It wasn't a battle he could win, but he wasn't going to be happy about it.

“Fine. Whatever.”

He started to go, but turned back around and snatched the bra off the counter, figuring he'd at least get the object of her rage away from her. With a sigh he started to leave the kitchen, flinching when his mother's voice rang out after him.

“I'll be telling your father about this when he gets home.”

Mike paused for a second, his shoulders tensing, but left anyways, trying not to stomp juvenily up the stairs. He failed and then slammed his door to punctuate his frustration, leaning against it and sinking to the floor. He looked down at the pink undergarment in his hand and sighed, throwing it towards his open closet. Dealing with his mom was one thing, but his *dad*? He had no idea how he would react to this sort of situation.

With another sigh he started to get up, glancing down at his wrist to check the time. Oh wait, shit, Holly. Someone needed to go pick her up. He cracked his door enough to yell down the stairs.

“Don't forget to pick up Holly!”

He slammed the door again, feeling a little guilty, but pushed himself away from it anyways and flopped onto his bed with a frustrated grunt. Two weeks. He wouldn't see El for two weeks. Like it hadn't been hard enough to try to spend time with her before. And after last night... she was mad at him or something. Or at least Will made it seem like she was. Was she?

He heard the front door shut as his mom left and decided to find out. Seizing the opportunity, he jumped up and raced back down the stairs, grabbing the phone and dialing the familiar number, shifting his legs nervously, glancing at the clock. He had ten minutes before his mom got back.

“Hello?”

Oh thank God, thank heavens, it was her. Her voice sounded scratchy, like she'd just woken up, and he smiled despite himself, picturing her eyes all sleepy, her hair sticking up in the back where her cowlick was. He shook the thought out, focusing on the more urgent issue he needed to address.

“El.”

“Mike? Mike!”

The sleepiness vanished from her voice, replaced with joy, and then they were both talking at once.

“I’m sorry, Mike, last night, it was bad and I was stupid and—”

“El, thank God, I need to tell you something—”

They stopped talking at the same time and he heard her giggle.

“Sorry, you first.”

“No, you.”

She obliged, spilling the guilt she'd been sweating out all morning.

“I’m sorry, Mike. The party was dumb, if I’d known... I wish I hadn’t made you go. People are stupid. I was stupid. And um...”

He could almost see her tugging at her hair, the way she did when she was nervous, and he grinned. She let the strand go and swallowed, bolstering her courage. She knew he'd only done what was right, but he deserved to know how grateful she was.

“Thank you. For getting me out. I won’t do that again, get drunk... like that.” Her heard her take a deep breath. “And thanks for stopping me. In the car.”

Mike felt his heart speed up. Stopping her had been the right thing to do, he'd known that, he'd repeated it all night, but hearing her say it made him sigh in relief.

"I'm glad you stopped me. Because... I don't want to do it when I'm... like that," she took in a quick breath, "I want to be me. When it happens."

Her words plowed into him like a bulldozer and he felt his heart rate spike.

"Wait so... um, you *do* want to?"

The words practically squeaked out of him and he winced at how uncool he sounded. *Smooth*.

"Yes." Her voice didn't waver in the slightest. "I love you, Mike."

His heart was going to race right out of his chest and he was smiling so hard he thought his face would break. His face so hot he could have melted the phone, but he didn't care because his girlfriend, the person he loved more than anything, totally wanted to have sex with him. He couldn't keep the grin off of his face as he answered.

"I love you too, El. So much."

"When?"

"When... when what?"

"When can we..." she paused and giggled, "when can I see you?"

His heart sank as he remembered his overly harsh grounding. He glanced at the clock on the microwave, realizing his time was running out, that his mom would be home soon. Looking over his shoulder towards the front door, he jiggled his leg nervously.

"Um, well, that's the thing. You left your bra in my car."

"Oh... yeah."

"And my mom found it."

He heard her gasp.

"Yeah, she kind of grounded me for two weeks. I can't see you or call

you until I'm ungrounded or she'll kill me."

"I'm sorry!"

He could hear the guilt and shame in her voice and he cringed.

"No, no, don't worry about it, it's fine, but um... that's two weeks," he licked his lips, "until I can see you or hang out or... anything."

"Okay."

There was no hesitation, her voice sounded sure.

"Okay? I mean, two weeks, that's longer than... I've never actually been grounded that long before—"

"Mike." Her voice was full of affection, he could almost hear her smiling. "It's okay. I'll wait."

A car door slammed and he could hear Holly's voice chattering away outside.

"El, I gotta go, but, um, I love you, I'll see you at school, okay?"

"Love you too, Mike. Bye."

The front door creaked open and he had just enough time to slam phone back on the hook and dive out of the kitchen, heading for the basement door and running down the wooden steps as silently as possible. He grabbed his D&D binder off the table and collapsed onto the couch, listening as the footsteps above him went up the stairs, then came back down. He tried to calm his breathing and his pounding heart as the basement door opened.

"Mike?" His mother's voice rang out.

"Yeah?"

"What are you doing down there?"

"I figured since I won't actually be able to play any campaigns for two weeks, I might as well make some new ones!" he winced at his

snarky tone but decided she kind of deserved it for grounding him for so damn long.

There was a silence.

“Fine.”

The door shut and he let out a relieved breath. Then he grinned, flopping back onto the couch, trying not to wiggle with glee. His conversation with El, however brief, had definitely made the past twenty-four hours worth it. It was going to have to get him through the next two weeks too, the thought of which definitely dimmed his glow a bit, but at the moment nothing could bother him. Not even the impending talk from his father. Well, okay, that one was a bit worrying.

Ted Wheeler went golfing every Saturday morning from ten o'clock to two, as long as the weather permitted. Today it had, and Mike glanced at his watch, realizing he had an hour and a half until he his untimely death. He hoped it was a good round of golf, then maybe his dad would kill him in a less painful way. With a sigh he sat up, still giddy but deciding to actually work on his current campaign, since sitting around wouldn't help anything and he didn't feel like starting homework just yet. It was a Saturday and he had cause to celebrate.

The time passed quickly as he dove into the mythology. He'd just finished working out a way for Will to escape the frost giants when he heard the front door open and shut. There was a low murmuring from above, maybe an argument, and then the basement door opened. Ted's hesitant footsteps thudding down the stairs.

“Mike?”

He looked up from his binder, trying to be nonchalant.

“Hey, dad.”

His dad was still wearing his argyle vest and golf shoes, and looked unsure, mouth set in a grim line. For a moment they just blinked at each other, neither one wanting to start the conversation they knew

had to happen. Mike coughed and managed to get something out.

“So, um, how’d golf go?”

“Oh, uh, good. It went good. I got a hole-in-one and did better than Jenkins so...”

He trailed off, blinking at his son, shifting uncomfortably but knowing he needed to say something or else Karen would be on his ass all day.

“Mike. Your mother told me... she said you were, uh, doing inappropriate things with your girlfriend.”

“It’s... we weren’t, dad. Not... really.”

Ted put his hands up dismissively, not wanting to hear details. He walked to the table where Mike was sitting, pulling out a chair—Will’s chair—and sitting down, lacing his fingers together and looking very... business-like. When he spoke, it wasn’t angry, far from it actually. The look on his face was one of concern, and Mike wasn’t sure but it almost seemed like his dad looked a little... proud?

“Look, son, I know that I’ve always been a bit hard on you, but you really are a smart kid, so just... don’t get her pregnant, alright? I mean, your mom wants grandkids and all, but if you could just wait ‘til you’re married and have a job, that would be a lot more convenient.”

Mike coughed, almost choking on his spit. That was not what he had been expecting at all. *Is he... okay with this?!*

“Um, yeah. Okay,” he managed.

His dad twiddled his thumbs awkwardly for a second, then reached into his back pocket, grabbing his wallet. With practiced precision, he pulled two fives out and threw them towards Mike, watching as they landed over the snarling face of the frost giant in front of him.

“Here, uh, make sure you get some protection.”

Mike stared down the money, then up at his dad. *What the fuck.*

Ted got up then, deciding the conversation was over, and headed for the stairs. He paused and looked back at his son, nodding in approval.

“She really is a nice girl, Mike. You should keep her around.”

God knows if you'll find another one that cute, he thought to himself. He really did like that El. She was the only who laughed at his jokes at dinner and sometimes she'd bring over baked goods. How his son had managed to get her attention, he had no clue, but he was glad she seemed to actually like the weird kid and his friends. He was halfway up the stairs by the time Mike managed to make himself speak, still in a state of shock at the unexpected conversation.

“Um, thanks dad.”

“Don't mention it.” He paused, thinking, and turned back to his son, brows furrowed. “Seriously, don't mention it to your mother. Just tell her I threatened you with something, uh, no magic games or whatever it is you play.”

“Sure, dad.”

“And try not to let her catch you with underwear again.”

“U-uh, sure.”

With that he left, closing the door behind him securely. Mike let out a breath he hadn't known he was holding and then collapsed onto the table in front of him. He had been expecting something awkward and uncomfortable, but that conversation hadn't been something he could have imagined ever happening and he was strangely relieved. Sitting back up, he looked down at the money in front of him, Abraham Lincoln's grim face reminding him that he was still lacking something rather important if he ever managed to get some time alone with El. He'd thrown out the old box like Nancy told him, but he hadn't had time to run to the drugstore lately, and now that he was grounded he really wasn't sure if he would be able to find an excuse to head over there.

Two weeks. He groaned internally. He would have to make it.

Notes for the Chapter:

i can't lie, writing ted is one of my new favorite things. he's just such a... a dad haha.

it kind of seems like i'm making it impossible for these poor kids to get it done but i promise that it is definitely coming haha. i just can't make it easy for him, what would be the fun in that? it will happen, don't worry, but bear with me, it's gonna be a story too.

as usual, let me know your thoughts! ideas! critiques! i've got the whole story worked so i don't need prompts for the other chapters, but if you have ideas for other stories or one-shots i am all ears.

4. Never Gonna Give You Up

Notes for the Chapter:

here is the newest chapter as promised!

this was the chapter that i ended up splitting in half because it got so loNG. but i really wanted to get into el's a mind a bit before... um... well... heh. she's so interesting and hard to write because she doesn't think as much as she acts? so like finding moments where she's just thinking is challenging but i hope i did a good job.

el and hop are gonna kill me i swear haha.

El missed Mike. Well, she usually missed Mike, but the past few days she had *really* missed Mike. School was the same busy hustle, keeping them just out arm's reach, with the exception of lunch or a few minutes between bells, during which they would try and cram as much casual talk and handholding as possible. The grounding was taking its toll on the pair, and she missed being able to just be with him, working on homework or watching a movie or even lazily slouching on a couch, her hands playing with his hair while he told her stories.

She didn't know what exactly had changed, but their confessions over the phone had made the air between them electric. Every time she saw him, her stomach got all shivery and her head got fuzzy and then she'd start burning, wanting to just tackle him and kiss him like no one was watching. But there was always someone watching, so she'd settled for quick pecks, letting her lips linger a second longer than usual and watching his eyes flicker hungrily as she pulled away. They were both going a bit crazy, and it was driving their friends absolutely batshit insane.

"How long until you're ungrounded?"

Dustin's voice was less cheery than usual. As much as he loved his friends, he was so over their constant giggling and handholding and

eye-gazing. It was giving him a damn cavity from the sweetness.

“Nine days.”

El spoke at the same time Mike did, and they looked at each other, smiling. Dustin pretended to throw up.

“I’m actually going to be sick.” He gagged louder, making the group at the table next to theirs look at them, disgusted. “If I have to watch the two of you bone each other with your eyes for one more day....”

He pretended to collapse. Lucas sighed and rolled his eyes, annoyed, shoving Dustin upright off the bench they were on. He was annoyed too, but he knew what was going on better than Dustin, so he put up with it.

“Sorry, Dustin.” El’s smile was more of a smirk, ruining any chance of her apology being taken seriously by her frustrated friend.

He huffed and rolled his eyes, reaching over to grab one of Lucas’s M&Ms, earning himself a smack. El looked over at her boyfriend who was resting his chin on his hand and staring off into the distance, brow crinkled in thought. Her heart fluttered.

More than anything she wanted to just get Mike alone, so she could... do something. She didn’t know *exactly* what she wanted to do, actually, but for the most part she wanted to finish what she’d started in the car. The thought alone made her flush, and she shifted uncomfortably, crossing her legs to try and lessen the burning between them. Mike’s hand, which had been resting comfortably on her knee under the table, shifted higher up her leg as she readjusted, and he looked down at it, then up at her. She bit her lip and he shifted it up higher subconsciously, closer to the edge of her pleated, sky blue skirt, fingers brushing the edge of the soft fabric...

“They’re doing it again!” Dustin complained loudly.

They jumped apart, slightly embarrassed, and they looked over to see all three of their friends giving them very uncomfortable, very disgusted looks. Will’s face was a strange shade of green as he stared down at his untouched sandwich, while Lucas was mostly just

annoyed. Dustin sighed, rubbing his temples.

“Can’t you just sneak out of your house, Mike?”

Like he hadn’t thought about that already. His window was his best option, but he wouldn’t be able to use his car, and it would be a long walk to the Byers. If he wasn’t back by morning he would be screwed, and as much as he wanted to, he couldn’t justify making his mom’s wrath worse. Especially since El had said she would wait.

He didn’t know it but she was regretting that sentiment now, fully meaning it at the time but too restless now to care for it. She’d perked up a bit at Dustin’s suggestion, but slouched back down as Mike shook his head.

“Nah, it’d take too long to get around. If I get caught my mom will lock me up for another three years.”

Dustin offered up a few more options, most of which were stupid and unrealistic. As Mike shot them all down, El was struck by a thought.

Why don’t I sneak out?

Her house fairly easy to get out of unnoticed, as long as the back door and the dog were quiet, and she still had her bike. She’d had put off getting her license at Hop’s insistence, stating that it had been hard enough to get a birth certificate and he could give her a ride if she really needed it. She berated herself for not thinking of it earlier that week, but was too excited to be too mad. A wicked smile crept onto her face as she formulated her plan, but no one noticed, and soon enough the bell rang, signaling the end of lunch.

She flounced off to the class she shared with Lucas, leaving her boyfriend with a chaste kiss, and squirmed through the beginning of British Lit, eyes drifting up to the clock every few minutes, hardly able to wait for school to get out and night to fall. She was so preoccupied she almost didn’t notice the note that landed squarely on her desk. It had her name scribbled across the front and once she noticed it she opened it, curious as to who would be passing her notes.

Elle,

Sorry about the other night at the party. I didn't mean for everyone to laugh at you, I was just trying to help you have fun. I totally suck. Can you apologize to Mike for me too? I hope we're still cool.

-Tracy

El disregarded the misspelling of her name and turned to look at Tracy, who was sitting catty-corner to her, worryingly shredding a scrap of paper.

They hadn't talked since the party, avoiding each other's gaze during class and in the hallways. El didn't necessarily blame the other girl for what happened at the party, but she had decided that she didn't want to try and pretend to be something she wasn't like she had that night. If Tracy only liked her when she acted like that, it wasn't worth it.

She hadn't really expected an apology, but she had been a bit sad to lose her only female friend. The little note may not have seemed like much, but to El it felt like a victory. Someone she'd reached out to, someone she'd become friends with on her own, cared enough to apologize and want to make things better. Her answer was obvious.

Glancing towards the other girl, she waited until their eyes met and then smiled softly, nodding her head. Tracy relaxed, blinking gratefully, and then they both turned back to the teacher, El slightly less distracted, feeling happy. After the bell rang, she met her friend outside of the classroom.

The taller girl pulled El into a hug, and when she let her go she was smiling.

"I was a total asshole, but I still want to be your friend."

"Me too." El half-shrugged, playfully smirking. "And you're my only... girl friend. The boys get stinky and boring. I need you sometimes."

Tracy laughed, the sound carrying through the hallway, causing some people to look their way curiously. That was one of the reasons El

liked her, she was loud and bold and it made El want to do the same. Be unafraid to let people stare.

“Is Mike okay? I know it was totally shitty what they said. Like, you don’t have to lose your virginity to date someone. It’s totally a personal thing. Sex is like... so overrated anyways.”

Tracy sniffed, and El was suddenly worried. For the most part she’d heard it was good, one girl in her PE class even mentioning that it was better than chocolate, which she didn’t quite understand. Chocolate was pretty good. But there were other girls who seemed indifferent. She looked up at Tracy, keeping her voice low so no one would hear over the sound of the noisy hallway.

“Is sex... boring?”

The redhead looked thoughtful, weighing her answer, not wanting to discourage El but at the same time telling the truth.

“I think... with the right person it isn’t boring. But some guys don’t care about you, they just wanna get it in and get out and don’t care if you have a good time. That’s boring.” She scoffed, clearly thinking of someone but not naming names. “If your boy actually cares, then it can be... it can be pretty fucking great.”

She snickered, then looked El up and down, raising an eyebrow, face devious.

“Why, you thinking about it?”

El nodded, deciding she could trust her, and also hoping to maybe get some advice.

“Yes. Tonight. I’m going to sneak out. Mike got grounded because... well, I left a bra in his car. We maked-out... no, made-out, and his mom found it.” Tracy’s eyebrows climbed her forehead, not expecting such a confession from her innocent friend. She didn’t even notice the grammatical blunder and El kept going. “But we both want to do it and he cares about me and... I don’t think he’ll be boring.”

She smiled optimistically, somehow maintaining an innocence about her despite everything she’d just said, and Tracy nodded, taking it in

and thinking. Her brow furrowed and she looked curiously down at El.

“Why are you sneaking out?”

El shrugged, thinking it was obvious.

“What else would I do?”

“Just tell your mom you’re staying at my house. I mean, it’s a Friday night anyways, and I know I usually have sleepovers on Saturdays, but I don’t think it’s too much of a stretch.” She grinned conspiratorially, eyes wicked. “And then you and lover-boy can have all night if you need it.”

El opened her mouth to disagree, but couldn’t think of a reason why it wouldn’t work. She didn’t like lying to Joyce or Hop, not after everything they’d done for her, but she remembered how Mike had lied to his parents for her, several times, and she decided it would be okay this once. And it’s not like she wouldn’t be safe, she’d be in the safest place in the world—with Mike. She nodded.

“Yes,” she gave Tracy a grateful smile, still nodding, “it’s a good idea. But... are you sure it’s okay? What if... what if Joyce or Hop call you?”

It wasn’t likely to happen, but El couldn’t help but worry. Tracy waved her hand nonchalantly, rolling her eyes easily.

“I’ll just tell them you’re in the bathroom or something, don’t worry about it, I can cover for you. I’ve done it for Alana too. It’s what friends do.”

The warning bell rang, and they both looked up, startled. Tracy looked back at El, her face suddenly serious and full of sisterly concern. She reached out and gently took the shorter girl’s hand in her own.

“You’re sure you want to do this? Because I’m behind you one hundred percent, but I just... I want you to be happy.”

She squeezed the hand she held reassuringly, offering a genuine

smile. El had been watching the other girl's face, eyes blinking and observant, but now she looked down, smiling at her shoes. Her eyes came back up and there wasn't a trace of doubt on her face.

"Yes. Mike makes me happy." She swung their hands casually, appreciating the comforting gesture and support. "And I want to make him happy." Her brow furrowed and she frowned, annoyed. "And I want to stop feeling burny all the time."

"Burny?"

"Yeah. You know." She made a vague gesture downward and Tracy's eyebrows shot up as she caught the meaning. "Burny."

"Ohhhh," they were both giggling now and Tracy shook her head in disbelief, "I didn't realize that little Mikey Wheeler was getting you so fired up. Who knew?"

They hallway was getting empty and they realized they should probably get moving so they weren't late. Tracy had most of her classes with El even though she was a year younger, and they happened to both have this one too. She wasn't done talking though.

"Well, make you sure you get some condoms from the nurse or something, first." She slung her arm around El's shoulders, pulling her away from their lockers and towards their next class. "And make sure he actually puts it on, some guys just pretend, uh, unless you don't think Mike would that. Oh and—"

They walked to class, Tracy trying to pack in as much as advice as possible before the bell rang, friendship happily restored. When El sat down in Biology, she found herself glancing at the clock again, even more excited. This one was one of the few classes she shared with Mike, though the alphabetical seating chart placed them on opposite sides of the room, one of the drawbacks of having last names that started with B and W. It was reversed, so she was at one of the tables in the back, shared with Marcilee Albert, and he was at one in the very front. From her seat she watched him, the back of his dark mop of hair bobbing as he looked back and forth between the teacher and the notes he was furiously scribbling. He was really good at taking notes, and he usually lent them to her to go over if she didn't

understand something, his even-spaced handwriting comforting to read as she tried to memorize the different body systems.

Right now she'd rather be memorizing his body system, and she sighed, picking at the pink rubbery eraser in front of her, tearing it into smaller and smaller pieces. Her restlessness was annoying her, and she did something uncharacteristic. Concentrating and trying to act like she was just stretching, she grabbed one of the little pieces of eraser and sent it flying with a flick of her wrist, guiding it with her mind so it pinged lightly off of the back of Mike's head. It was too soft, and he only reached up and brushed at his hair distractedly. She huffed, annoyed, and tried again, this time with a bigger piece. She didn't even know why she was doing it, but for some reason she wanted him to turn around so she could see his face. Just for a second.

The second piece struck just as accurately as the first, only this time it made him startle, and he grabbed the back of his head, turning around, his face the epitome of confusion. El managed to stifle her giggle, her smile a bit smug as their eyes met. She waved and blew a kiss, something she'd seen Tracy do with one of her crushes, and watched with glee as he awkwardly smiled back, face flushing a bit at the uncharacteristic gesture. Others turned to see what he was looking at, giving her curious glances, but her eyes were focused only on Mike's reddening face. She couldn't wait until she could finally be with him alone.

The teacher cleared his throat and everyone quickly whipped back to the front, Mike included, giving the disgruntled adult their fullest attentions. The teacher raised his eyebrow at El, who suddenly felt kind of ridiculous and looked down, but continued on with his lecture, voice droning.

She sighed in relief, almost regretting what she'd done, but when she looked up towards the front of the classroom, she noticed Mike was casually looking over his shoulder at her. When he caught her eye he smiled back, his leg jiggling nervously as he tried to casually drop a folded up piece of paper to the floor. His foot came down on it to kick it backwards towards her, and she helped it with an invisible tug that kept it heading her away. It fluttered beneath feet and tables and she let her hand drop down so it could fly into her hand. Marcilee

glanced over at her as she brought it up but said nothing, not really caring about her tablemate's actions as long as it didn't endanger her grade.

El carefully unwrapped the note, blinking at the familiar writing. It was short, mostly numbers with a badly drawn smiley-face next to them.

8 days 10 hours 43 minutes 12 seconds

It took her a second, but she cracked a smile when realized he had calculated in exact seconds how long it would be until he was ungrounded. She looked up from the note just in time to notice him watching her again, and she smiled appreciatively. If only he knew.

After that she didn't trust herself to keep the secret of her evening plans, so she avoided him and their friends during the last class of the day, sneaking to the nurse's office afterwards so he wouldn't be able to see her before he went home per their Friday tradition. She felt a little guilty, especially when she saw his car driving extra slowly out of the parking lot, but she needed to stop and talk to the nurse anyways. And she would see him later, so that would make up for it, she told her herself.

Hop picked her up from school as usual, since Will had his oil painting class, and as she ducked into the beige Blazer he looked over at her, eyebrow raised curiously.

"Don't I usually pick you up in the parking lot by Wheeler's car on Fridays?"

Shit. Of course he would notice when something was out of the ordinary, he was a cop.

"Oh, um, he had to go home fast, his mom said so," she replied quickly, unable to think of anything.

Hop looked at her for a second longer but shrugged, not caring enough to press the issue. He headed for the minimart so they could pick up a carton of ice cream to share while watching Miami Vice later. Usually they got fudge ripple, a compromise that they both

liked, but that night she let him get his favorite, butter pecan, to try and assuage her guilt for the lie she was about to spin.

“Hop?”

“Hm?”

He glanced at her as headed back to the house, reaching over to turn the radio down so he could hear her better.

“Can I stay at Tracy’s tonight?” She scraped the ice off the carton of ice cream with her finger nail distractedly, not making eye contact. “She invited me over and I said yes.”

“Tonight? What time?”

El blinked. She hadn’t thought about that.

“Oh, um, like ten? After Miami Vice?”

“I suppose so... but... doesn’t she usually have sleepovers on Saturday nights? You guys doing something special tonight?”

She was trying not to sweat now, cursing his questioning nature. The only thing she could think of was the truth, so she spat out what had happened during the day.

“We had a fight. But now we’re okay. She wanted to make up for it.”

He glanced over at her again and she tried to smile and look unassuming.

“You had a fight? About what?”

“Mike.”

She blurted out his name and then closed her eyes, realizing bringing him into the conversation wasn’t a good idea.

“You had a fight about Wheeler?”

He didn’t sound like he believed her.

“Um, yes. She thinks he’s... lame.” Hop snorted and El frowned at him, not liking that he agreed. “But I told her she was wrong, because he’s *not*.” Another snort. “And she felt bad. She wants to paint my nails and do my hair. To say sorry.”

The mention of girly things threw him off and he finally dropped the suspicious cop attitude.

“Yeah, sure, kid. Do you need me to drop you off?”

She shook her head.

“No, I’m going to bike.” He was starting to look suspicious again and she explained, having already thought up this lie earlier. “It’s still nice out and I want to exercise. And then you don’t have to get up early and pick me up.”

She knew he loved sleeping in on Saturdays, or he loved trying to. The only reason she hadn’t obtained her license yet was his paranoia, an attempt to keep the government from coming back and sniffing around, so usually when she chose to bike somewhere he didn’t argue, knowing he would lose once she pointed out that she would gladly drive if she could. He didn’t like her riding around in the dark though and tried to protest.

“But that late at night? Kid, you should let me drive you...”

“I’ll be careful, I promise. Please?”

She was doing the thing with her eyes, the thing she knew melted Mike and would occasionally work on her almost-dad. He glanced over at her and then sighed, deciding it wasn’t a battle he could win.

“Alright, alright. Quit it with the face.”

Now she was smiling and she affectionately reached over and stole his hat, plopping it on her head and laughing as he scratched at his growing bald spot. By the time they got back home, they’d both forgotten the conversation, instead arguing about what would happen in that night’s episode. El jumped out of the truck, running inside to put the ice cream in the freezer before it melted. Will wouldn’t be home for another hour and Joyce had taken an evening shift, citing

she wanted to make a little extra so they could afford some new carpet. They'd repainted the outside of the house that summer and Hop had helped to reshingle the roof. Apparently they wanted to renovate the inside too.

El went to her room next, grabbing her backpack and then for her dresser, trying to decide if she needed to bring anything with her that night. She had to at least pretend she was going to a sleepover, so she grabbed a clean change of clothes, some fresh undies, her toothbrush, and her hairbrush. She checked the front pocket in her backpack, smiling at the brightly-colored, crinkly contents, then glanced at her open door cautiously before grabbing one of the mystery objects out of it's hiding place and shoving it into one of her hidden skirt pockets. Zipping up her bag, she looked around her room, trying to figure out if she needed anything else, and then wandered back over to her dresser.

Opening her top drawer one last time, she looked down at the contents and suddenly realized that she should change something else. She shifted through her small assortment of bras, deciding on the pink one with the lace, her favorite, and managed to find some underwear that matched. Most of the stuff she owned was pink, so it wasn't too hard. Her stomach was doing that shivery thing again, and as she reached over and mostly closed the door (she never lost her habit of keeping it cracked) and switched out her underthings, she suddenly realized that maybe she was a little nervous about this whole sex thing.

Up until that moment she hadn't really thought about, reacting on instinct and feeling to successfully keep her and her boyfriend satisfied during makeouts. He'd never tried to push it, always the courteous one, and she wasn't entirely sure what to do anyways, so it just hadn't happened. Now it was almost expected and she couldn't keep the nervousness from bubbling up in her stomach.

Still in her underwear, she wandered over to the full-length mirror that hung on the back of her door, spinning a bit to look at herself from different angles. She was still on the shorter side, barely reaching 5'4, and most of it was her long, muscular legs, which were still a bit tan from the summer. It was different from Nancy's petite frame, and Tracy's tall, willowy figure, with more softness around her

thighs and hips, and she turned and looked at her butt with an unhappy sigh, reminding herself to cut down on the ice cream a bit. It was easy to nitpick, too much flab here, not enough there, why were her teeth so crooked, why were her arms so scrawny, why did her hair always stick up in the back? The insecurities swirled around her.

“Pretty?”

The word she'd longed for so long ago echoed in her mind and she crossed her arms over her chest self-consciously, staring at her reflection and hoping that it would be enough. Her eyes traveled around the edge of the mirror.

The whole thing was ringed in photos, ones she'd collected from photo albums, or begged from Jonathan, and even a few she'd taken herself. Her favorite was near the top, on the left side, and she found herself staring at instead of herself, taking in the figures of her and Mike, dressed for prom, his grin pasted goofily across his face as she laughed at him. The nervousness that had been gnawing at her stomach died away as she remembered every time he'd called her pretty, or beautiful, or gorgeous. Every time he'd saved her, from a nightmare or a bully or a social situation she didn't understand, eyes kind and understanding, like they had been the first night he'd pulled her out of the rain and covered her with his coat as she shivered. There had never been a time when he'd been disappointed with how she looked and it made her heart feel fluttery instead.

She blinked, lost in thought, not hearing the footsteps coming up the hallway.

“Hey, kid, did you want to order a pizza since—”

The door swung open and El jumped back and shrieked, covering herself with her hands, eyes huge and surprised. Hop's hands slapped over his eyes and he backed up, almost tripping over himself as she slammed the door shut with her mind, accidentally smashing the heavy wood into his face. He yelped as the door bounced off his nose and then she ran forward and physically shut the door as he got out of the way, her face positively burning.

Four years ago she'd almost stripped in front of her friends because she didn't know any better, but since then she'd come to understand the intricacies of privacy and had come to value it. This was definitely embarrassing because it had to be *Hop*. The hallway was quiet for a moment as El pulled her clothes back on and Hop tried to wipe the pain-induced tears out of his eyes, rubbing his nose and snorting. He hoped it wasn't broken.

She opened the door and peeked out, face still flushed pink. The Chief gave her an awkward smile, face scrunched up, nose red and eyes watering. His embarrassment was worse than hers, since he'd been who'd barged in on her. She couldn't help but laugh a bit as he tried to find a way to apologize while still crying and snorting.

"I should knock. Every time. Geez, El, sorry, that was stupid... I..." He pinched the bridge of nose and snorted again, wiping at his swelling snout tentatively. "I'm really sorry, uh, I just wanted to know if you wanted to get a pizza since Joyce and Will won't be home for a bit..."

She perked up at the mention of food.

"Pizza? With bacon? And pineapple?"

Her penchant for that particular combination could be blamed on Dustin, and Hop winced. He was trying to make up for what he'd just done, so he sighed and compromised.

"Half. The other side is gonna be good old sausage and black olive." She was grinning at him now, embarrassment fading. "For those of us who like *normal* food."

She punched him playfully in the arm and he chuckled and pushed her shoulder in retaliation, apologies accepted as they gently roughhoused all the way down the hall to the kitchen, where he ordered the pizza and she made him an ice pack with a towel and ice. His nose was definitely swelling a bit and when Joyce got home she couldn't stop laughing at the large bulbous, red thing that had overtaken his face. Will joined them after he got back from his class, toting several wrapped canvases which he stashed in his room.

By the time they'd finished dinner and she was tucked on the couch with a spoon and Hop and ice cream, she'd kind of forgotten she was even planning on leaving. After the show had ended she was yawning and thinking about her bed, the familiar routine of home making it easy to forget her secret mission.

"Don't you need to head to Tracy's soon? Get your nails done or whatever?" Hop reminded her.

She stuttered out a yes, running back to her room and grabbing her backpack, brushing her hair once more and even sneaking into the bathroom to dab on a little bit of perfume that Joyce had hidden in the medicine cabinet. Her stomach started shivering again, and she tried to squelch the feeling, choosing to be excited instead. She was going to see Mike! She loved Mike! Her determination to see him took precedence over her nerves and she headed for the shed to grab her bike after saying a quick goodbye to her mom.

It was after ten o'clock, but the streets were still fairly busy since it was a Friday night. She took the back way, through the woodier parts that edged the backyards in his neighborhood, hoping to go unnoticed. By the time she made it to the Wheeler house, she was out of breath and a little sweaty, but her determination was burning and she crept around to the front, ducking beneath the windows and hoping none of the neighbors would spot her.

Like a ninja, she reminded herself.

The climb was harder than she'd expected, and she ended up having to use her powers to help levitate herself up the rest of the way onto the roof, wiping her nose on her hand afterwards. Holding her breath, suddenly nervous, she gave his windows a few quick taps.

No answer. She tapped a bit harder, but still nothing. *Shit*. Biting her lip, she gave the window a gentle tug, but realized it was locked. *Double shit*. Using her powers again, she wiggled the lock loose, sighing in relief as it easily slid out of its hold. Another tug and the window was open, just wide enough for her to squeeze in, parting the curtains and looking around the room expectantly. It was empty, his bed still made, and she sighed at the hitch in her plan. Where the hell was he?

The door was cracked open and the hall light still on, so she carefully crept out of his room. She tried to make herself as light as possible, looking towards the bathroom to see if he was showering. Door open, light off. Thankfully both his parent's and Holly's doors were shut, light off, and she looked around, feeling slightly frustrated.

Where did he go? Where else would he go? The answer was pretty obvious when she thought about it. Oh. Basement.

She took the stairs as mutely as possible, holding her breath the entire time and tugging a strand of hair nervously. She didn't really break rules that often, not feeling the need to, so she was extremely nervous about getting caught. The rest of the lights in the house were turned off and she hoped she wouldn't trip over anything, trying to remember exactly where all the furniture was. Her hand touched the doorknob to the basement, and she opened it, tentatively putting her feet on the first step before closing the door behind her, wincing as the hinges squeaked a bit.

There was a flurry of paper from further down and Mike's voice floated up the stairs.

"Mom?"

El walked down a few more steps, bending down so she could peek under the edge of the stairwell. Mike was sitting at the table, surrounded by papers and binders and D&D figures, a pencil in his hand as scribbled out notes for the campaign he was working on. When he realized who it was, his eyes widened and his mouth dropped open. She stifled a giggle, suddenly giddy, hurriedly coming down the last few stairs to stand where her could see her, enjoying his surprised reaction.

"El?"

He couldn't believe his eyes, and he sat in frozen in shock mouth gaping open. She didn't bother to stifle her giggle this time, her cheeks flushing as she took in his disheveled appearance. He was ready for bed, in an old Ghostbusters shirt and plaid pajama pants, hair sticking up in the front from where he would run his hand through it, like he always did while planning campaigns. His mouth

was still hanging open, inky-eyes huge as he realized that she wasn't a dream.

She stood facing him, in front of the couch, letting her backpack and jacket fall off of her and onto the floor, a grin stretching across her face. She forgot why she'd been nervous, smiling sweetly at her surprised boyfriend.

"Hi, Mike."

Notes for the Chapter:

DON'T HATE ME IT'S COMING I PROMISE PLEASE

i've never really written hop before so this was new, but i like that they have sort of a father-daughter relationship but it's definitely not one? like exploring that is fun, for me.

i meant for tracy to be a throwaway character but then she kind of became more important soooooo yeah maybe she'll come back, i don't know, what do you guys think? i based her off of like three different people i know and i didn't intend for her to be so damn likable lol. but el needs a female friend so badly poor lil cupcake.

alright every hold on and we'll make it to chapter five and eeaauuuggghhh i can do this i can totally do this.

5. Careless Whisper

Notes for the Chapter:

i'm screaming and i probably won't stop screaming for a while.

so here it is. are you ready? because i wrote and i'm not ready. hhnennnnNNNNGGGHH.

i need a glass of wine. have fun or whatever, everybody.

Mike was sitting at the table, but the sound of El's saying his name woke him from his stupor and he jumped up, almost knocking over the stool. He quickly closed the space between them, reaching forward and pulling her into a hug, definitely confused but ecstatic to see her. She let him hold her, tucking her face into his chest and breathing him in, stomach no longer shivery but warm, like the arms around her. He let her go so he could look at her flushed face, wanting to ask the obvious question.

"How did you... did you sneak into my house?" he sounded incredulous.

His eyes were dark in the dim basement light, but his face was oozing curiosity and she nodded, smiling and looking satisfied with herself.

"I came in through your window," her brow furrowed and she looked up at him, pouting a bit, "but you weren't there."

"No, I... I came down here to work on this campaign for when I'm not grounded and it's got frost giants and like three different cave systems to travel through..."

He trailed off, noticing he was starting to ramble, realizing that it didn't matter why he was down here because *she* was down here now. Her eyes blinked up at him, and he felt her shiver as she pressed herself to him, hands on his chest. Without thinking, without trying to think anyways, he stooped his head down and kissed her.

It was like a switch had been flipped, the two of them realizing that the moment had arrived, that they were finally, *finally* alone. She reached up, wrapping her arms around his neck and pulling him down even closer, kissing him back with a greedy fervor that he welcomed, reaching down to grab her waist, trying to pull her even closer to him. One of her legs came up, wrapping around his hips, and then the other, and he staggered a bit, her weight throwing him off balance. He kept a firm grip on her, not wanting to stop kissing, and managed to walk the few steps towards the couch, dropping her onto it more roughly than he meant to. She looked up at him with a smirk and a raised eyebrow and he frowned apologetically.

“Sorry that was... sorry,” he looked sheepish.

She didn’t seem to mind, waving off his apology, just wanting him to hurry up and kiss her again. Her arms were reaching for him and he leaned down, almost surprised when she pulled him down on top of her, his waist between her legs, her strength aided by a bit of her powers. Any nervousness she’d been feeling evaporating as she pulled him into another fiery kiss. She fell back and then grinned wickedly, wrapping her legs around his hips again and pulling herself up to grind against him. He gasped and shuddered at the contact, not hesitating to push her down into the couch and grind back. This time she was the one gasping, and then their mouths met again and they were kissing, his hands pushing her shirt up to slide across the smooth skin on her stomach, her hand coming down to help him, both tugging the polo up and over her head.

He looked down appreciatively. Her bra was pink, like the other one, but seemed fancier, with more lace. She let him look for a moment before tugging at his shirt, and he obliged, letting the clothing disappear, and then pulling him down to her so she could trail kisses up his neck to his ear, doing that thing with his earlobe that she had learned made him crazy. One of his hands came up and squeezed a breast and she whimpered, feet skidding against the couch, taking in a breath. He looked down at her, his eyes hazy and squinted and she whimpered again, trying to slide her skirt down her hips. He helped and they managed it get it down to her ankle where she shook it off onto the floor. He noticed that her panties matched her bra and he smirked, knowing there was no way it was an accident.

She bit her lip and looked up at him, eyes uncommonly vulnerable, like that day in the lake when she'd let him see her bare for the first time. He sucked in a breath, trying to get his voice to work, to tell her how good she looked. She needed the reassurance, for him to confirm what she already knew.

"Holy *fuck*, El," he breathed, unable to form a better sentence.

It was enough. Her eyes lit up, still sultry, and she pulled him down to her again, letting him place kisses on her neck, across her shoulder, and then down, one of his hands going behind her to try and unhook her bra. He was failing miserably, trying to keep his mouth on her and take it off at the same time. She took pity and reached back, easily unhooking the tricky undergarment and sliding the straps down her arms. He pulled it the rest of the way off with eager hands. It landed on the floor on top of her shirt and his mouth went down further, his tongue coming out to lap across her firm flesh, a whimper leaving her mouth as he did so. He smiled against her and did it again, alternating on each side, trying give both of her breasts equal attention, playfully nibbling at her as she gasped and keened. The hand that had been resting on her stomach slid lower, towards her panties, and he looked up at her, not wanting to do anything that made her uncomfortable but also wanting to go further. She bit her lip but placed her hand on his and guided him further down, face almost shy as she pushed his hand beneath the fabric of her underwear. As he made contact with the warmth between her legs he noticed several things.

The first was the noise she made, somewhere between a moan and whine, a noise he decided he wouldn't mind hearing every day until he died. The second was the amount of moisture. As much as he hated thinking about Nancy at a time like this, he was remembering what she had told him about women and grinned, figuring he must be kind of good at this in order for his girlfriend to end up this wet. El noticed his cheeky grin and frowned, not in the mood to allow him to be smug. She pushed his hand further down, letting out a noise of frustration as his fingers brushed her entrance. He had a pretty clear idea of what he to do but looked up at her, just to be sure. She nodded, hoping he would get the clue that she wasn't about to stop anything that happened that night.

“In.”

The word was barely a breath, but he understood and gently pushed his finger into her, slightly surprised at how easily it slid in. When he looked up at her again, her head was thrown back, one hand gripping his wrist, the other his shoulder, and another word left her mouth.

“M-Mike...!” she gasped, tilting her head back down to look at him. Their eyes met and he felt a bolt of gratification as she looked at him with needy eyes, silently begging for more.

He decided his name had never sounded better and slowly pulled his finger out, pushing it back in more quickly, noticing how her grip on his wrist and shoulder tightened. He wanted her to say his name again, and he added another finger, realizing how tight she was for the first time. Moving his hand again, the way he had before, he got what he wanted.

“Mike,” she whimpered voice ragged, “please.”

Her pleading spurred him on. Continuing his movements, he twisted his wrist, trying to get a better angle as she whimpered and keened, whispering his name between moans and panting. It was the best fucking thing he'd ever heard in his life. He sped up a bit, her hand assisting him in setting a pace, and he noticed she was getting a bit louder. Her legs shifted restlessly, brow furrowing, getting closer to his goal. He blinked. *Is she gonna...?*

His wrist was getting a bit tired, his movements erratic, but he didn't stop, and suddenly she was squeezing his arm between her thighs and *whimpering* and it almost sounded like she was crying as she tightened around his fingers.

El felt herself shuddering, back arching as an intense warmth radiated from her core through her entire body, mind blanking for a second before she gasped and slumped back, every muscle relaxing. She blinked her eyes and tried to catch her breath, looking up at him with a newfound appreciation.

Mike allowed himself to stop, gently pulling his fingers out and away. He pressed a kiss to her forehead as she caught her breath, feeling

strangely impressed with what had just happened. He didn't want to ask, it seemed kind of obvious, but the words left his mouth anyways.

"Did you just..."

"Organism." Her brow furrowed, and she shook her head, mind still scrambled. Definitely not the right word. "No, um... orgasm."

He managed to keep himself from laughing at her bumble, finding it incredibly adorable despite the fire that was still burning in his body. She seemed a bit embarrassed for a second, but it didn't take long for her to shake it off, and she reached up to pull him down into a kiss, this one more gentle than the ones before. Her hands were still a little shaky and she smiled against his lips. She ended the kiss and then lifted herself up a bit, trying to get closer to his ear.

"It was good," she whispered.

Her warm breath in his ear sent shivers down his spine, and as he looked down into her hazel-browns, he felt himself get harder. She seemed to sense what he was thinking and let him go, her hands trailing down his front to his crotch. He was wearing pajama pants this time and she tugged the tie, pushing the waistband down his hips easily, pausing as he pulled them the rest of the way off.

They were both suddenly painfully aware of how little fabric was left between them, and she reached down again, this time for her panties, quickly wriggling out of them before grasping at the edge of his boxers. He didn't know why he was nervous, but again, she seemed to know, and she looked up at him, eyes soft but still hungry. They both worked to remove his underwear, and when it was done there was a pause as they took each other in, admiring the silken skin and hidden lines they'd never seen. El was definitely intrigued, having no real experience with penises before. Her hand searched lower and she curiously grasped him, making sure to be gentle. He inhaled sharply.

Her face was curious, and she was surprised at how soft the skin was, her thumb rubbing softly across the top. Mike shuddered, trying to keep himself up on his elbows so he didn't crush her, but hardly able to focus on anything that wasn't his dick in her hand. She gave it a gentle squeeze, and he grunted, closing his eyes. Looking up at him

with a smile of satisfaction, she did it again, eliciting a similar response. Experimenting further, she firmly grasped him and pumped her hand up and down, smiling as he swore and began to breathe more heavily. She repeated her movements and would have kept going, but after a minute his hand came down and snagged hers.

“El.” His voice was tight. “You... you’re going to make me...”

He trailed off, the embarrassed one this time, but she seemed to get his meaning. Her face scrunched up, confused.

“But... don’t you want to?”

She had no clue that men were more of one-and-done kind of a thing, and he didn’t really feel like explaining it at the moment. Instead he gently pulled her hand away, bringing it to his lips and kissing the back of it softly, like a thank you.

“Yeah, but um... not yet.”

That seemed like a good enough reason to her and she didn’t press the issue. The bliss of her first climax had worn off a bit and she was ready for more. They seemed to share the thought and suddenly Mike swore, collapsing a little bit on her, his face defeated. El didn’t know what was wrong, and she looked at him, visibly worried.

“What?”

“I... I don’t have a condom,” he said, looking frustrated and disappointed at the same time.

He hadn’t had time to go and buy any yet, and he actually thought he might punch himself in the face for forgetting something so critical. Hearing a soft snicker below him, he looked down at her, wondering what could possibly be funny at the moment. She was smiling and gently pushed him off of her, leaning over to grab her skirt from the floor. There were hidden pockets in the lining, where she usually stashed candy, but out of one she pulled a small, square, crinkly packet. She held it out to him with a smile and he stared at her in wonder.

“Where...?” he was stunned but grateful.

“School nurse. Today. She gave me so many...”

The irony was humorous and he couldn't help but chuckle, reaching down to kiss her forehead, then her cheeks, amazed at how thoughtful she was. He kissed her lips and she snagged his face with her hands, keeping him there, deepening the kiss and reigniting the fire between them as she ground against him again. Carefully, he ripped open the wrapper and pulled the condom out, fumbling with it a bit before rolling it on and then readjusting his hips so he was right between her legs again. They were both panting heavily and eager, but he hesitated, wanting to make sure she was completely okay with what was about to happen.

“El... you're sure?”

She blinked up at him, the hunger in her eyes replaced with something softer, something that made her answer easily.

“Yes.” It was a breath and answer at once, and she reached down, guiding him closer with her hand, keeping her eyes fixed on his. She didn't waver. Her choice was clear.

“I love you, Mike.”

The words whispered from her lips as he pushed in, and he held her carefully, pausing to appreciate her words, her love and trust for him in the moment. It was a tight fit, or at least more resistant than he'd hoped, but he slid in fairly easily, unable to hold in a gasp at the euphoric feeling of being inside of her. He kept pushing forward until he was hilted, breathing heavily and looking down at her at to make sure she was okay.

Her face was scrunched up a bit, eyes closed, mouth parted as she gasped, but she didn't seem to be in any obvious pain.

“You okay?” he croaked

He barely managed to choke the words out, the amazing feeling making it hard to concentrate on speaking. She opened her eyes, face relaxing, looking damn-near *content*. She nodded, still panting.

“Yes. It's different but...” Her hips bucked up a bit, experimentally,

and they both inhaled sharply at the new, unexpected sensation. She recovered first, managing to squeak out the end of her sentence. "But good."

The rush of relief that flooded through Mike was almost ridiculous. He hadn't hurt her, which was what he'd been most worried about, and it almost seemed like she was enjoying it. She bucked up against him a little harder and he gasped again, looking down at her face. Her hair was tangled around her head, a honey-brown halo, and even though she was panting and sweaty, he couldn't help but think of how beautiful she was, her face flushed and eyes hazy as she gazed back at him. She raised an eyebrow, tired of his staring, and wrapped her legs around his hips, pulling him down and somehow almost further into her, making him breathe heavily through his nose and breaking him out of his stupor. Her breath hitched.

"Mike." Her voice was frustrated. "*Move.*"

He didn't need to be told twice, shifting his hips back and then down, thrusting gently at first, but speeding up as she moaned, encouraging him. He could have passed out it felt so good, but the nails digging into his back kept him going, her gasps and whimpers making him want to get her to finish again. Tilting his hips up a bit, he thrust in at a different angle and she almost shrieked, eyes flying wide open, fixing on his, begging him for more. She was barely able to utter the word that choked her throat.

"*F-fuck.*"

She didn't swear very often, and he knew he had to have done something really right to make her say it like *that*.

He tilted his hips the same way, keeping them in the same position as he started pounding harder, speeding up again, watching as she whispered "*fuck*" over and over, her forehead creasing, legs tightening around his waist again, nails almost ripping a hole in his back. He knew he was getting close, the pressure growing, but he surged on, letting out an uncharacteristic growl. He was determined to get her there again. His thrusts were growing more erratic as he struggled to keep a steady pace, but she was swiveling her hips to meet each one and the room filled with the sound of his grunting and

her gasping and the soft slapping of skin on skin.

Out of nowhere he felt her tighten around him like she had before, his name on her lips as she cried out, light exploding in her vision as she stared up at him. He let himself go then, grunting as he came, his whole body tense, his head light as he collapsed, barely catching himself with his arms before he crushed her.

It was quiet except for their heavy panting, both trying to catch their breath, the endorphin rush making Mike dizzy. He shifted back a bit, pulling out of her rather abruptly, and she rolled onto her side, letting him slide in behind her on the couch. His arm came up to wrap around her waist and he pulled her to him tightly, tucking her into his body perfectly. Their skin was fiery, but the air in the basement was cool, causing El to shiver a bit, so he reached back and grabbed the blanket off the back of the couch, letting it fall over them. They lay still for a moment, satisfied, and Mike pressed a kiss to the back of her head as she snuggled into him. It was a perfect moment.

He remembered something and frowned, reaching down and sliding the condom off. He felt kind of bad for not doing it before they started cuddling. That was probably gross. He wasn't sure what to do with it, but she snatched it out of his hand and casually tied a knot in it before letting it drop to the floor with their clothes. She snuggled back into him again, lacing his fingers with hers and sighing contentedly.

"How did you know to... with the condom?"

It wasn't exactly post-coital sweet talk, but he was curious.

"Gladys."

"Who?"

"The nurse. She told me some things. She was... cool."

He dropped the subject, wanting to focus on his girlfriend and not the wrinkled lady who had helped them.

"El."

“Mm?”

“Did... um, did you like it?”

There was light laugh and Mike frowned, not entirely sure that was the answer he was looking for.

“Mike.” Her voice was soft and she managed to roll over and face him, his arm keeping her from falling off the couch. “Can we do it again?”

Her eyes were eager, and he was almost surprised that she was serious. A doofy grin lit up his face as he realized that he had in fact, done a good job in pleasing his girlfriend. A great job, considering how eager she was to do it again. One of her legs, slender and soft, wrapped around his, pulling their hips closer, and he let his self-satisfaction pause momentarily so he could explain why that couldn't happen right away.

“I totally want to but, um, well... guys take longer to... reload.”

He flinched at his stupid choice of word, but she seemed to understand, and started pouting instead.

“How long?”

“Jesus, El, I don't know, I haven't done this before.”

She sighed, but snuggled into his chest, deciding she was content for now. It's not like they wouldn't have other opportunities. He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her to him and nuzzling her temple, placing yet another kiss on her forehead.

He kept thinking about how vocal and confident she been the entire time and it made his heart dance, knowing he'd managed to make her feel safe despite the entirely new situation. She was thinking about how glad she was that she had snuck into his house, how grateful she was to not be drunk and stupid, and how much she loved the tall, awkward boy who was holding her in his arms. She let the words she'd told him earlier slip out again.

“I love you,” she whispered, like it was a secret just for him.

He squeezed her tightly, knowing he wouldn't be able to find words to explain how he felt, but hoping he could explain why.

"El, I love you too. And I know... I know I don't say it enough but," he swallowed and she tilted her head up to look at him, glowing with affection, "I just—I hope you know it's not because I don't love you, it's just... I want to show you, because, it's—it's too easy for me to just say it. But I want you to know, I-I..."

She realized he had started crying, the tears silent but wetting his cheeks. Her heart thudded, stomach shivery, unsure of why he was reacting that way. She'd only seen him cry like that once before—the night she'd come back—and even then that had been mostly relief... this was something more. There was fear lurking behind his eyes, like he was haunted by something she didn't quite understand.

"I just love you so much, El. I never want... I *can't* lose you ever again." She reached up and wiped some of the tears from his face and he looked down at her, eyes so full of love and desperation that it took her breath away. "I *love* you, please, don't ever leave again, I love you."

It had been four years since she'd vanished without a trace, four years since she'd found her way back, but there had always been a fear, a constant uncertainty if she would stay. Whether or not there would be another monster to try and take her away again, or another demogorgon to stalk their footsteps. And now the fear was bursting out of him like water overtaking a dam. It was a fear she didn't share. She'd decided long ago that if anything tried to take her away she would *fight*. Fight to stay with the people she loved, fight for her new family, fight for *him*. She wouldn't let herself be taken away ever again.

As she gazed up at him her heart felt full, and she let him cry the years of fear out, wrapping her arms around him and placing a gentle kiss on his tear-stained cheek, offering the only reassurance she had. What she already known since she'd returned but maybe he hadn't entirely accepted yet.

"I'm here, Mike." She tucked her head under his chin, letting their bodies fit together like a perfect puzzle. "I'm here. I won't go. I love

you.”

He gripped her tighter, nuzzling his face into her hair, no longer crying but breathing shakily, her words reassuring him. It was a quiet defiance, what they shared, a defiance against all the forces that had tried to keep them apart. That had tried to keep them from this *exact* moment. They didn’t need to say the word, the one that had bound them together since they were kids, because the promise was already there, weaved into the “I love you” that they kept whispering back and forth.

It wasn’t long before they fell asleep, foreheads pressed together, arms wrapped around each other, snuggled under the blanket. Both would have been content to stay like that forever, and it was sheer luck that woke them before they were discovered.

Actually, it was Lucas.

Tap tap tap!

Mike opened his eyes lazily at the sound, confused for a second as to why he felt so naked. He shifted a bit and his hand skidded across warm skin and soft curves, helping him remember. El muttered something under her breath and tucked herself further into his chest. She’d never liked being woken up in the morning. He looked down at her as their night together refreshed itself in his mind, smiling softly and brought a hand up to push her hair out of her face.

Tap tap tap!

Someone was definitely knocking on the door that led outside, and Mike realized he could see a shadow through the gauzy material of the curtains. His heart started pounding nervously and he tried to extract himself from El’s arms without disturbing her. It didn’t work and as he attempted to crawl over her his foot caught on her leg and he fell off the couch with a dull *thud*, wincing as his knees and elbow hit the hard, rug-covered cement. Standing, he grabbed his boxers and pulled them on, getting nervous as the shadow tapped on the door again.

“Mike?” El had whispered his name, still on the couch, and he looked

over at her.

She had rolled over, and now gazed up at him, still bleary-eyed but concerned, wrapping the blanket around her as she sat up. He smiled fondly, her sleepy face was his favorite, but was interrupted by another tap. The person on the other side sighed, audible through the door, and got closer to the window.

"Mike? It's Lucas. I know you're down here."

They both relaxed a bit, it wasn't a parent, and Mike considered just ignoring his friend and going back to snuggling on the couch with his cute, naked girlfriend. They still had some time before his parents woke up.

"Don't make go around front and ring the doorbell. I'll wake up your whole house if I have to."

Lucas's voice was annoyed, and Mike was annoyed, and even El looked annoyed, so with a sigh he went over, unlocking the door and opening it a crack, peering out with a glare.

"*What?* What do you want?"

Lucas tried to push the door open and come in, but Mike had his foot wedged in front of it and didn't let it budge more than a few inches. They were both glaring at each other now, but he wasn't about to let his stubborn friend see El when she was wrapped in nothing but a blanket. He repeated the question.

"What do you want, Lucas? I'm..." he coughed lamely, "...busy."

"Busy doing *what*? Is the campaign a secret or something?" Lucas pushed against the door again. "Just let me in, I need Honors Chem notes."

There was a battle of wills as they fought over the door, but Mike had El's invisible help and it didn't budge. Lucas gave up, but was instantly suspicious, of Mike's attitude and his friend's newfound strength. Lucas had always been stronger.

"Why can't I come in, dude?" he huffed.

“Just... come back later, okay? I’ll get you the notes.”

“You’re grounded, that’s why I came now, before your parents woke up.” He leaned against the doorframe, trying to peer into the space behind Mike, painfully curious. “I knew you’d be down here, you always fall asleep working on campaigns. What’s with the secrets all of the sudden?”

Mike refused to answer, glancing over his shoulder at El, who was now trying not to laugh. Apparently she found the situation hilarious even though he was mostly just annoyed. She offered him a weak smile and he sighed, trying to think of something to say that didn’t sound like complete bullshit. He was too slow.

“Wait... is someone else in there?” Lucas asked.

Mike snapped back to attention, face turning an unmistakable shade of red, giving away the answer. There was a pause as Lucas put the pieces together, glancing at his friend, who wasn’t wearing a shirt, and then the space behind his head. The apparent strength, the embarrassed face, the semi-naked friend...

His cheshire grin stretched across his face and he nodded at Mike, smug and slightly pleased, watching his friend turn an even brighter color. He took a gamble and spoke into the space over Mike’s shoulder.

“Hey, El.”

Mike was staring at the ground now. He didn’t notice that she had gotten up from the couch, and he startled, almost bashing his against the door when she gently set her hand on his back, coming up behind him. Standing on her toes she peeked over his shoulder, one hand keeping the blanket securely wrapped around her, the other one waving at their friend amicably.

“Hi, Lucas.”

She wasn’t embarrassed but she stayed mostly out of sight, wanting him to go away so she could have more time with Mike. He waved back, then reached forward and patted Mike’s shoulder, seeming

proud, nodding his head in approval. He stepped back from the door.

"You know what, I'll go home." Mike finally glanced up at him, looking grateful but still a little pissed. "Just get me those notes, man. I gotta start studying for the test now or I'm gonna be..." he snorted out a laugh and looked at his friend pointedly, " *...fucked.*"

With a final cheerful wave, and another smug grin, he saluted the two half-naked teenagers and turned around, heading back to his house and laughing softly to himself. Mike shut the door, locking it securely, and then walked back over to the couch and flopped onto it on his back, groaning into his hands. That was not how he wanted any of his friends to find out... but at least it had been Lucas and not Dustin. He fretted a bit longer, not noticing that El had wandered over to her discarded backpack, snagging something out of it. She came back over to her flustered boyfriend who still had his hands over his eyes and smiled to herself.

He felt her drape herself over him, and uncovered his eyes to look down. She'd left the blanket on the floor, and lay on top of him completely bare, her chin resting on his chest. Dropping the condom she'd grabbed onto his neck, between their faces, she looked up at him, eyes eager, a smirk on her lips. Her hand slid down his chest and fiddled with the edge of his boxers.

"Again?" Her voice was soft and breathy and he felt his breath hitch as his arms reached down and pulled her closer.

Like he could say no to that.

Notes for the Chapter:

there it is. i did it. well.... they did it hahaaaa. but yeah.

i... i don't know what to say? um i guess if you liked it please leave a comment and validate me because i have been sweating for days over this. i wrote this chapter two weeks ago but i have been editing and fixing it and trying to make it perfect because i mean i haven't written anything explicit before sooo...

yeah just tell me what you thought. plz.

6. You're My Best Friend

Notes for the Chapter:

I'M SORRY

i had my cousin/best friend and friends come for new year's so i basically was kept away from my laptop for like a week! i meant to get this last chapter out awhile ago, but i was unsure about the ending so i also wanted to wait for my editor and he came through so... yay!

i'm sorry if you're expecting smut in this chapter you will be disappointed, it's mostly just a wrap up, but if there wasn't enough sex in the last chapter then... i don't know what to tell you haha.

more el and hop! i'm enjoying exploring this relationship. and mike and holly! which is just adorable and tbh it's just how i wish my older brother and i were cause we're not close but oH WELL YAY INSPIRATION.

also if you guys haven't figured out how much i love 80s music by now.... holy fuck i love 80s music.

El left Mike's house around nine-thirty, both reluctant to part but neither wanting to get caught by his parents. She'd changed into her fresh clothes, grateful she'd brought them, and headed home on her bike, unable to keep herself from smiling. By the time she made it home it was almost ten, and she could see movement in the kitchen—someone making coffee. She came in the back, the door unlocked like she'd left it, and headed for her room, still glowing after her night and morning with her boyfriend, but desperately wanting to shower after all of the... exercise.

She tried to be fairly quiet since Joyce was probably still sleeping, and closed her door almost all the way, dropping her backpack onto the bed and grabbing her hairbrush out of it. Her hair was definitely

on the greasier side, and she wanted to shower before it became obvious that she had, in fact, not had a girl's night.

There was an extremely deliberate knock on her door... it had to be Hop. She grimaced, deciding it would be more rude to not let him in, and as she picked up her backpack to empty it of its contents, she looked over her shoulder and called an answer.

"Come in."

The door opened at the same moment that she overturned her backpack and shook it hard. She'd forgotten to rezip the front pocket, and while she'd only been wanting her dirty clothes a shower of brightly colored packets came out too, covering her bed and falling onto the floor around her. She froze in terror as Hop came in, two cups of coffee in his hands.

"Hey, kid, did you have a good time? I made extra coffee—"

She had bent down, frantically trying to pick up the evidence of her lie before he could see it. She was too slow, and he froze, staring down at her and what surrounded her. Looking up at him, she knew he was going to figure it out, and the guilt was written across her face, eyes wide and horrified. His eyes went from her appearance, hair disheveled and nails unpainted, to the condoms in her hand and scattered across her bed, and finally to back to her face, reading her too easily. The coffee mugs in his hand shook, and he set them down on her bedside table with deliberate *thunk!*, reaching up to cross his arms, face going from cheerful to disbelieving to livid in a matter of seconds.

"El."

She stared at the ground, not wanting to meet his eyes, feeling guilty and ashamed. She didn't want to look at him and see the disappointment she knew had to be all over his face.

"*Eleven.*"

His voice was like cold steel, and she trembled as she looked up and met his eyes, the burn of anger she found there familiar. She'd seen it

before, for years, in the eyes of Papa every time she'd done something wrong or something bad. His voice even sounded like Papa's, calling her that name, the one no one really used anymore, the name for who she used to be. He spoke again in the same tone and she flinched.

"Did you go to Tracy's last night like you told me?" he asked coolly.

She was too afraid to lie, too petrified to do anything but shake her head back and forth. Tears filled her eyes. He knew she hadn't gone to Tracy's, but he wanted her to say it, to admit to the lie.

"Where did you go?"

A door opened further the hallway and there was the sound of feet shuffling towards the room where they stood. Joyce came in before El could make herself reply to the damning question. Her mother's hair was still ruffled from sleep, wearing the soft green pajamas El had given her for Mother's Day that year. She took in the unusual scene before her and frowned, noting her adopted daughter's apparent fear.

"What is going on here? Hop?" She walked over to him, setting a hand on his arm and frowning.

He didn't look at her or even acknowledge her, still fixated on El.

"Jim."

The use of his first name broke his concentration and he looked over at her, face still a mask of anger. She reached forward, pushing him back from the terrified girl, eyebrows raised, clearly concerned.

"What? What happened?"

She looked back at El, who was glancing between the two adults, eyes wide and scared, shrinking down smaller until she was sitting on the floor, leaning against her bed, knees pulled up to her chest. It was her coping method, shutting down, when something triggered her and sent her mind to her days in the lab. The tears were starting to come now and Joyce was suddenly upset, realizing what was happening to her child.

“Jim, what are you *doing*? You’re scaring her!” She shook him, trying to get a response, and he finally broke out of his angered state, still tense but now apprehensive. He gestured to El and the condoms, face becoming less angry and more just concerned.

“She... she’s having sex, Joyce!”

Joyce snorted in disbelief. “Is that it?”

She left him to go to El, kneeling down next to her and pulling the frightened girl into her arms, letting her sob into her shoulder, glaring back at Hop and shaking her head in disbelief. “That’s no reason to scream at her, Jim. You know she doesn’t respond well to anger. You’re giving her a panic attack.”

He looked at her, outraged she wasn’t on his side.

“But she’s just a kid! She... she’s too young to be doing that!”

“She’s seventeen. How old were you when you started?” She pursed her lips, remembering their high school days. “If Chrissy Carpenter was right, you were younger.”

Hop flushed, starting to look more embarrassed than upset, realizing that maybe he had overreacted a little bit.

“That’s... that’s different. What if—what if she got pregnant! Or... AIDs?” He protested but much weaker, looking a bit worried as he saw how upset El was.

Joyce looked pointedly at the condoms scattered around them, rocking El, who was beginning to calm down, sniffing into her adopted-mother’s shoulder.

“I think it’s obvious they’re smarter than that.” She gave him one of her “are you serious” looks and then rolled her eyes. “And if you really think Mike has got AIDs then *you* should probably go back and retake sex ed.”

His eyes widened and his rage diverted to a different, much easier subject.

“Wheeler.”

At that El looked up, face still tear-stained and sniffing. Her eyes were fierce and defiant as she stared into her almost-father’s face, almost daring him to try.

“No.” Her voice shook, but both he and Joyce looked surprised by the amount of force behind her words. *“Leave him alone.”*

There was a silence as Joyce let her go and they both stood, facing Hop. El still looked fearsome and Joyce watched contemplatively, wondering how the situation was going to play out. El took a step towards him, no longer afraid, her need to protect Mike overriding the fear that had paralyzed her so badly.

“Don’t touch Mike.” She wiped her nose with back of her hand, not breaking eye contact with the tall man in front of her. “It was my choice too. I wanted to.”

The women’s stares were starting to get to him, and he deflated with a heavy sigh, feeling a bit ashamed for overreacting. He wasn’t willing to let the subject drop just yet. Okay, yeah, he was being overprotective, he realized, but he just didn’t want her getting hurt, not after everything she’d already been through.

“I... It’s just...” he sighed, “I’m sorry, El, I shouldn’t have yelled at you but...” he raised his eyebrows, “you shouldn’t have lied either.”

Joyce’s eyes widened and she turned her gaze back to El, who had the decency to look ashamed.

“Who lied? About what?” she asked.

“About going to Tracy’s.”

El looked at the carpet, deciding to just tell the truth, figuring it would be harder to try and keep lying. She was ashamed that she had lied, but she knew she had a decent reason and tried to explain.

“I went to Mike’s instead of Tracy’s. I couldn’t tell the truth.” She glanced up at them. “He’s grounded. I didn’t want him to get in trouble. I’m sorry.”

“Wheeler? Grounded?” Hop snorted. “I don’t believe it.”

“He lied. To save me.” Her chin tilted up, defiant again. “I did the same.”

There was a silence, Hop not sure where to go from there, and Joyce took over, reaching out to rub El’s arm reassuringly.

“Look, sweetie, I’m okay with you making your own choices, especially when you’re being responsible about it.” She glanced at the condoms again. “But we don’t want you to lie to us.”

El sagged at her mother's gentle reprimand, moving to sit on the bed, exhausted by all the emotions she'd experienced in the previous ten minutes. She nodded, peering up Joyce with a resigned sigh, feeling remorseful.

“I know. I’m sorry. I won’t...” she bit her lip, not wanting to make an impossible promise, “I’ll try not to do it again.” She shifted, clearly uncomfortable. “You... you can punish me. If you want.”

Hop nodded contemplatively, but Joyce firmly shook her head. He narrowed his eyes at her and she stared back, eyebrow raised as they had a silent argument. After a few more seconds he lost, glancing away and sighing heavily.

“Nah, it’s okay, kid. I... I think I scared you enough.”

She looked up at them, unbelievably, and her eyes filled with gratitude. It never stopped being strange, not being punished when she did something wrong, and she wasn’t sure if she would ever get used to the feeling of relief. Standing, she came forward and gave them a hug at the same time, smiling and snuggling them tight. Hop seemed surprised, but hugged her back, letting himself soften a bit. She let go and stepped back, wiping the last bit of snot off her face. It was always a mess when she cried.

“Thank you,” she smiled at them gratefully and they beamed back.

There was an awkward pause. El kind of wanted them to leave so she could go shower, but she didn’t want to tell them to get out. Joyce got the hint, however, and grabbed Hop’s arm, pulling him to the

door.

“Come and make me breakfast, Hop.”

“What? Why?”

“Because otherwise I’ll do it and burn the house down.”

He looked at her but sighed, not able to deny that she probably would, and they bustled out of the room, Joyce giving her daughter a small smile before they left, closing the door behind her. El picked up her dirty clothes and threw them in the hamper before going back and picking up the scattered condoms, deciding to keep a few in her backpack and tucking the rest into one of the drawers in her bedside table. Hop had left the coffees, his black and half gone, and hers, still warm, with her preferred scoop of hot chocolate, two sugars, and milk. She picked it up and drank some, feeling grateful.

His anger had been scary, she couldn’t pretend otherwise, but part of her knew it came from a place of genuine love, not possessive disappointment, like Papa. Hop had never, up until that morning, scared in her the same way that Papa had, with a paralyzing fear followed by harsh solitude that kept her from disobeying. He had actually apologized for his anger, foregoing punishment entirely. It was still hard for her, even after all these years, to figure out where some emotions came from, like anger coming from love, but it was easier to accept and she wouldn’t trade it for the sterile silences and cold anger she’d known for too long.

With a content sigh she grabbed her clothes, took another sip of coffee, and headed for the shower.

&&

After El left, Mike had stood in the doorway for a while, watching where she had disappeared with a smile. He still couldn’t believe it, how lucky he was, and he would have been happy to just stand there and think about her soft smile but the floor above him creaked with footsteps and he decided he should pick up the basement before someone came down. He rearranged the couch, trying to fold the blanket and put it back how it had been before, making it all look

Karen-approved. He'd already redressed, and disposed of the condoms and wrappers by balling them up inside of some old campaign notes, knowing there was no way anyone would be digging through that trash.

When he emerged from the basement, he could hear his parents talking in the kitchen, Holly's voice babbling in the background. They looked up as he walked in, voices hushing, and he tried to be casual, afraid his face had "I HAD SEX" written all over it. He grabbed a glass and then opened the fridge to get some milk. When he closed it his mom cleared her throat expectantly to get his attention.

"Michael."

The glass of milk he'd been about to drink paused halfway up to his mouth and he turned to look at them, hoping his face looked innocent.

"Oh, um, good morning."

His mom paused and frowned, reaching out to pat at his hair, which was sticking up wildly in every direction. She took in his appearance and he tried not to scream internally as she looked him up and down, managing to keep his face passive. The question she asked wasn't what he expected and he stifled a sigh of relief.

"Did you fall asleep in the basement again?" She smoothed his hair again but gave up. "That can't be good for you. You should be sleeping in your bed. "

He shrugged, nonchalant, but didn't argue or disagree. She sighed but moved on to what she actually had been wanting to talk about.

"Mike." By the way she said his name he knew this was either the beginning of a lecture or an explanation. "Your father and I were talking and..." he crossed his fingers and hoped it was the latter, "...and we decided that I was a bit... harsh, when I punished you for the, *ahem*, clothing I found in your car."

He could hardly believe his ears. *She* was apologizing? She was *apologizing*? He tried not to let the surprise show on his face, instead

just nodding, glancing between his parents. She continued, not looking happy and glancing at Ted, who was munching on some bacon, reading the paper.

“It wasn’t fair of me to overreact. You are old enough now to make *smart* choices—” she raised her eyebrows at him expectantly, “and while I’m allowed, as your parent, to punish you for lying or disobeying me, it’s not okay for me to punish you because you aren’t ready to share certain details about... your life.”

Karen looked at her husband, who had been snarfing down his breakfast during her talk. He paused and glanced up, nodding in agreement and trying to look like he had been listening. She focused her attention back on her son and he went back to his paper.

“So. We have decide that one week of grounding was enough. Especially since you didn’t do anything that wasn’t allowed. As of right now, you are officially ungrounded.”

Mike broke out in a sweat and smiled nervously, suddenly very glad he had sent El home when he did. If they’d been caught he would have been in for a whole new world of pain. He set his cup of milk down and tried to find a way to respond to that wouldn’t make it obvious that he had totally broken every restriction she’d set.

“Wow. Um, thanks guys.”

His mom came forward and hugged him, rather unexpectedly, and he let her, hugging her back semi-awkwardly. He only really hugged El, and he wasn’t about to hug his mom the same he hugged his girlfriend. When she pulled back she smiled up at him, looking sentimental.

“You really can talk to me, Mike. If it’s relationship problems or school or whatever.” She was almost teary-eyed and he shifted uncomfortably. “I’m your mother and I love you. I’ll listen and I won’t judge.”

He hugged her again, hoping it would keep her from crying. There some things he didn’t want to talk to her about, and this was definitely one of them.

“Um, love you too, mom.”

Ted glanced up from his breakfast again and gave his son a small, conspiratorial smile before checking his watch and standing up. He patted their shoulders as he passed them.

“I’m going to be late. I’ll see you later.”

He hustled out before anyone could reply, grabbing his golf hat as he went. When Karen finally let her son go, her nose was scrunched up, face sour.

“You need to take a shower, Mike. You smell like you ran a marathon last night.”

He flushed and backed away, grabbing his milk and taking another drink to try and hide his face, very glad she didn’t know how close she was to the truth. There was toast and eggs waiting for him at the table and he sat down next to Holly who was trying to make some sort of art out of her food. Remembering his sister’s words in the car the other day he decided to try and see if he could get an answer out of her, which was always a gamble. He casually nibbled some toast and then looked over at her.

“Hey, Hols?”

“Mmm?”

She was focused on spreading the yolk of her egg around the edge of the plate, face pinched in concentration.

“Remember when I took you to piano lessons last week? And we talked about... about Jem in the car? And El?”

“Mmhm.” She still wasn’t really paying attention, but he wasn’t ready to give up yet.

“Okay, do you remember how you said I was Rio and I always saved El?”

“Yeah.”

“Did... did she tell you that? That I... save her?”

Achieving whatever she had been trying to do with her food, she stopped and looked at him, face unimpressed.

“Duh.”

He set his toast down with a sigh, a little frustrated, and tried one last time.

“Okay, can you tell me what she said?”

The little girl huffed, clearly annoyed by her brother’s dumb questions. She stared at him for a second and he got the impression that she was scheming up something. He was right.

“I’ll tell you if you watch Jem with me today.”

Mike groaned but decided that it would be worth it if she actually told him what he wanted to know.

“Okay, yeah, sure. Just tell me.”

Holly clapped her hands excitedly. She didn’t get to spend a lot of time with her brother, he was always doing homework or playing with that magic game with his friends or hanging out with El. He was cool, but she always seemed annoy him, so she usually didn’t barge in too often even though she wanted to hang out with him more. But now she was going to get watch Jem with him. Nodding and smiling, she finally answered his question, eating her smeared eggs as she did so.

“She tells me stories.” She paused to chew and Mike almost burst a capillary while he impatiently waited for her to explain. “Like when she was scared of trick-or-treating and you made her feel better. Or the mean girls at school who called her ugly and you saved her and told her she was pretty,” she brightened up as remembered her favorite story, “oh, and the lake! She was afraid, ‘cause she couldn’t see the bottom, so you gave her a piggyback ride.” She pouted at him. “You never give *me* piggyback rides.”

Mike was absolutely astounded. She’d told his sister all those stories?

He hadn't really saved her, he was just... he was trying to take care of the girl he loved and make sure she felt safe. His heart got all fuzzy and he grinned stupidly, suddenly elated as he realized the depth of his girlfriend's affections.

He was so happy that he looked over at his little sister's frown and decided to change it.

"Well, here. Hop on."

He stood, crouching next to her chair. Her face grew excited and she stood on the chair, hopping onto his back with squeal. He grunted, she was heavier than he'd expected, but stood up, grabbing her legs and laughing as she wrapped her small arms around his neck, almost choking him. It was almost time for her show, so he ran out of the kitchen, doing a few laps around the house, bouncing her around as she shrieked, before landing them both in front of the TV. They watched Jem in silence, Holly hushing him if he tried to speak, and by the time it was over he was disgusted to find he was actually invested in what had been happening. She made him promise to watch it with her next week (he groaned loudly but decided there were worse things) and then he ran upstairs to shower and change.

While in the shower it hit him. He was ungrounded. He could go and see El, right now, and not have to worry about dying some horrible death at the hands of his angry mother. Finishing up as quickly as he could, he pulled on some clean clothes and scrambled for his keys, almost tripping as he ran down the stairs. He felt weirdly nervous, which was stupid because he'd just seen her a few hours ago. After they had... well...

His face warmed just thinking about it and walked through the kitchen with a doofy grin on his face. Sticking his head through the open basement door, he called down to his mom who was doing laundry.

"I'm going to see El, Mom! I'll be back in a bit."

There was a yelled back sound that sounded like an "okay!" and he wasted no time, ripping the front door open and nearly dropping his keys as he tried to unlock the car. He was stupidly excited, clumsily

wacking his knee on the steering wheel and almost running a stop sign on the way out of the neighborhood. It was hard for him to think of anything other than her, her face, her smile, her hair, her smell. By the time he reached the Byers's house his face hurt from grinning, and he parked, jumping out of the car and walk-running to the front door. He rang the doorbell and waited, shifting back and forth eagerly.

The door swung open and he found himself face to face with the Chief. He smiled, optimistic, about to ask if he could talk to El, but Hop's face darkened. Mike found himself backing up, almost falling off the porch as lead filled his stomach. Oh hell.

He knows.

"Uh, hi s-sir."

"Wheeler."

Hop's jaw clenched and unclenched and Mike stuttered a bit, trying to find something to say that wouldn't offend the older man in front of him who had a *gun*. Not that Hop was going to use it, his arms were firmly crossed across his chest and nowhere near the holster on his hip, but Mike couldn't help but picture several ways he might die in the next few minutes and ended up just gaping, unable to find anything to say that wouldn't incriminate him further. Thankfully he was saved.

"Hop? Who...?" El's soft voice came from inside the house.

She peeked around Hop's shoulder, face lighting up as she realized it was Mike, who was still frozen in fear. He relaxed when he saw her, feeling a bit sheepish at his immediate assumption that Hop was going to murder him. She squeezed out of the door, around Hop's immovable frame and turned to face the Chief with a curious face, wondering exactly what was going on that made her boyfriend look so terrified. Hop just shrugged, then deflated a bit, rubbing his temples with and letting out an exasperated sigh.

"You... you kids be, uh, safe. Alright?" he mumbled awkwardly.

He patted El's shoulder, looking between the teens in front of him with tired resignation and then turned headed back into the house with final shrug. El shut the door behind him with her mind and then whirled around and threw herself at Mike, arms reaching up to wrap around his neck, her face mirroring the excitement he'd been feeling on the way there, that had come back now that she was in his arms.

"You're here!" She paused and looked confused. "But... you're grounded?"

He grinned back at her, giddy again, and pulled her towards him, grabbing her by the waist and then spinning her around in circles. She shrieked, delighted, and giggled as she held onto him tighter, nestling her face into the crook of his neck as they spun, getting dizzy. He stopped and they both stumbled a bit, still laughing. He told her the good news.

"I'm officially ungrounded. My parents felt bad, I guess. Said I'd been punished long enough." He shrugged, more excited about the ungrounding than the reason behind it.

Gazing down at her, he felt his heart clench. Her hair was a little damp and she smelled like her favorite rose shampoo, and she was smiling up at him with unabashed adoration that made her whole face glow. It was similar to that night after prom, when they'd kissed and found themselves literally floating. He wondered if that would happen again and leaned down to kiss her, softly at first, but then a little fiercer as she put a hand on his chest and pressed herself against him.

There was a knock on the window behind them and they broke apart, looking over to see Hop giving them a pointed a look and making a shooing motion with his hands. El sighed and rolled her eyes and Mike led her further away from the house, making a proposition.

"So... I figured, since I'm ungrounded, we should celebrate."

"Celebrate what?"

"Um... us."

He felt a bit awkward, not wanting to say that they were celebrating having sex, but yeah, it kind of was that a little bit. She smiled even brighter, liking the idea, and reached down to lace her fingers with his.

“Ice cream?”

It was kind of a ritual, when either one of them accomplished something big, like getting an A on a paper or getting a job, they would go and get ice cream, even if it was ten below and blowing snow. Mike couldn't even remember how it had started, but it felt like the right thing to do, and he smiled back at her.

“Yeah. Is that okay with you?”

“Mike.” Her tone said “duh” so she didn't have to. “Ice cream is always yes.”

She rolled her eyes, but pulled him towards the car, leaning her back against it and beaming at him happily. He stood in front of her, jangling the keys in his pocket, excited to go but also kind of wanting to just stand there and stare at her. He couldn't resist, stooping to kiss her again, and when he tried to pull away she grabbed his face, not ready to stop either, things quickly growing fiery before El pushed him away with a gasp. He looked a bit dazed, but she shook her head and smirked.

“You said ice cream,” she said firmly, eyebrows raised.

“Yeah,” he sighed, “I did.”

He couldn't pretend like he didn't want to keep kissing her, but she was excited and he smiled before reaching for the handle and opening the car door for her. She thanked him with a peck on the cheek before sliding in and he shut it before going around and getting in. He started up the car.

“Mike?”

“Hm?” He looked at her as shifted out of park.

“Will you split a sundae with me?”

He shuddered. “El, last time I did you ordered sorbet and put *hot fudge* on it.”

“It was good!”

She was grinning and he smiled back, shaking his head as they headed down the driveway and onto the street that led into town. He loved her but he also loved mint chip, and she stopped teasing him, falling into a comfortable silence as he drove. She had rested her hand on the console between them and he reached over and took it, lacing their fingers again, grateful he had an automatic so he didn’t have to shift gears instead of holding her hand. The radio was on, just loud enough to be heard, and she started humming then singing along, the song older but familiar.

“Ooh, you make me live. You’re the best friend, that I have ever had.”

Mike found himself singing along too, doing a quiet harmony to her melody. She was the better singer between the two, but neither of them really made a spectacle of it, choosing moments like this over choir or voice lessons.

“I’ve been with you such a long time, you’re my sunshine.”

He glanced at her, trying not get distracted as he drove, but unable to help it, and she caught him looking, scrunching up her nose and sticking out her tongue. Focusing back on the road he couldn’t help but agree. Sunshine.

“And I want you to know that my feelings are true, I really love you.”

His grip on her hand grew tighter for a second, and he pulled into a parking spot in front of the ice cream shop, taking it back so he could shift into park. She was already reaching for the door handle, excited about ice cream, but he cleared his throat.

“El.” His voice was heavy and she stopped, turning back to face him, eyes inquisitive.

The car was still on, the radio still playing, and Mike found himself staring into her hazel-browns, struck speechless again, wanting to say something but unable to find the words that matched how he felt.

Instead he leaned towards her and kissed her again, his hand sliding forward to hold hers. She understood, intertwining her fingers and relaxing, kissing him back with an emotion that neither could have explained later if they wanted. It was something bigger than just love, something that surpassed labels and words, something that could only be felt. And in that moment it was theirs.

“Ohh, you’re my best friend.”

Notes for the Chapter:

there you have it.

i love mileven so much. these characters. my kids.
gosh i just love them.

i have some bad news which is that second semester has started, so between my shakespearean lit class, grammatical systems, and abnormal psych, i don't know how much i'll be able to write. HOWEVER i am NOT stopping, i still have several more stories cooking (more stranger teens as well as one-shots and fluff) and ideas/prompts to work out. i just won't be able to post as regularly because well... critical essays and presentations and other stress-inducing bullshit that i just need to get through so i can friggin graduate.

i love writing fics. and i love you guys. so i'm just letting you know i'm not planning on ghosting. but i'm just not going to be able to be as active unless i get punched in the face by inspiration or something.

so feel free to throw prompts or requests! if you want to chat i'm so down for it, especially if it spawns stories! be my muse, i will adore you.

lastly, thank you all for cheering me on. this story was definitely out of my comfort zone but your support and comments and kudos have totally made

it worth it. can't promise i'll be doing anything explicit again but i'm proud of myself for managing to do it at all haha. so really, thank you, i appreciate each and every one of you. <3